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The AMBASSADOR



by
JOHN OLIVER HOBBS.

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1920.

THE AMBASSADOR



“The earth! where is my earth? Let me look on it
For I was made of it.”

“The stones of it are the place of sapphires, and it hath dust of
gold.”



*[First produced at the St. James's Theatre, London, on
June 2, 1898.]*

THE AMBASSADOR

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

JOHN OLIVER HOBBS



SECOND EDITION

NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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✓

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PREFACE

ONCE I found a speech in prose—prose so subtly balanced, harmonious, and interesting that it seemed, on paper, a song. But no actor or actress, though they spoke with the voice of angels, could make it, on the stage, even tolerable. It was too long in one bar, and too short in another; it dragged, it jumped, it vexed the ear and stilled the brain; common rant would have been more vivacious: a column recited from the dictionary could not have been so dull. Yet the speech is nevertheless fine stuff: it is nevertheless interesting in substance: it has imagination: it has charm. What, then, was lacking? Emotion in the *tone*, and, on the part of the writer, consideration for the speaking voice. Stage dialogue may have or may not have many qualities, but it must be emotional. It rests primarily on feeling. Wit, philosophy, moral truths, poetic language—all these count as nothing unless there is feeling of an obvious, ordinary kind. Great passions and the “enormous” are, on the other hand, beyond spectacular representation. Love is probably the sole great passion which

an audience of average men and women can endure for more than one act and to a tragic issue. Large exhibitions of ambition, jealousy, avarice, revenge, pride, fear, and the like, please but few minds. The more emotions conveyed, or hinted at, the better, no doubt, yet not one of them, with the solitary exception already named, should be raised unduly to the depression of the others. The theatre is a place of relaxation. When the majority of pleasure-seekers find a piece tedious, it is a failure beyond question as a play. When the majority find a piece agreeable to their taste, it must have fulfilled, at all events, one vital condition of its existence as a piece. It is at least an entertainment. The vulgar, much-abused popular melodrama has this unfailing characteristic — it will hold, in the face of every æsthetic objection, your cheerful attention.

In a comedy, life must be presented in a deliberately artificial way — that is to say, presented under strictly artificial conditions. No one, for instance, in looking at a portrait is asked to mistake it for a wax model or a real personage. In admiring a twelve-inch landscape we do not blame the artist because we are unable to scamper, in reality, over his fields or pluck the lilacs in his garden. We go to him neither for a deception nor an imitation — but

for an idea, an illustration, or a statement. Play-writing and novel-writing may be compared in more senses than one to the art of landscape painting. To see the sun set once is not enough, to see once the tide come in is not enough, to have risen once, in the country, to watch the dawn of day is not enough. One must be so intimate with Nature that one could not — even if one tried — present her, or any aspect of her, conventionally. One knows nothing unless one knows her infinite variety. Describe humbly what you see, and you cannot go wrong; describe what others have been taught to see, and you can never, by any possibility, be right. The instinct of a close student of life is always to reject the plausible. It is by this ready acceptance of the plausible that human beings are so often, and unnecessary, disillusioned. No two creatures are precisely, or even within any real degree of approximation, the same: each soul has its own individuality. There may be schools of people just as there are schools of thought, but Types — the typical stage diplomatist, the typical young girl, the typical widow, the typical stage foreigner, the Type, in fact, of any sort — are not to be found in Almighty God's creation or man's society. They are nothing in the world, and there is no speculation in their eyes.

Let me beg that the persons in *The Ambassador* be judged by their actions and not by the hasty estimates passed upon them either by themselves or the other characters in the comedy.

My permanent gratitude and friendship are due to Mr. George Alexander for the distinguished art he bestowed upon his rendering of the title-rôle, for the support, interest, and kindness he gave so generously from the first reading of the play, through the many anxieties of rehearsing, through the yet greater anxiety of its first production.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY



LORD ST. ORBYN, British Ambassador at Madrid.
SIR WILLIAM BEAUVEDERE, Second Attaché to the British Embassy at Berlin.
VIVIAN BEAUVEDERE, his step-brother.
MAJOR HUGO LASCELLES.
SIR CHARLES DE LORME, G.C.S.I.
LORD LAVENSTHORPE.
LADY BEAUVEDERE, step-mother to Sir William Beauvedere.
JULIET GAINSBOROUGH, an orphan.
ALICE GAINSBOROUGH, her sister, a nun.
LADY GWENDOLINE MARLEAZE.
THE PRINCESS VENDRAMINI.
THE DUCHESS OF HAMPSHIRE.
LADY BASLER.
LADY ULLWEATHER.
LADY VANRINGHAM.
MRS. DASNEY.
MRS. WHITCOMB J. TAYLORSON.
MISS KATIE TAYLORSON } her daughters, studying Grand
MISS YOLANDE TAYLORSON } Opera in Paris.
MISS MAMIE TAYLORSON }
MRS. SPEARING, Lady Beauvedere's housekeeper.
TOMKINS, a housemaid.
RORTER }
JENKINS } footmen.
DUVAL, Lascelles' manservant.
TOTO.
LORD REGGIE.

ACT I. — *At Lady Beauvedere's residence in the Champs Elysées,
Paris.*

Four days elapse.

ACT II. — *Conservatory at Lady Beauvedere's. Thursday
morning.*

ACT III. — *At Major Lascelles' residence in the Champs Elysées.
Same morning.*

ACT IV. — *Garden at Lady Beauvedere's. Same morning.*



THE AMBASSADOR



THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: *At Lady Beauvedere's in the Champs Elysées, Paris.*

TIME: *About half-past two in the afternoon. A room luxuriously furnished; style Louis Seize. Here and there a modern piece of furniture. Quantities of roses, tables covered with books, photographs, vases, objets d'art. Cards on table R. Fancy work. Photo on piano. Newspapers up C. A marble bust of SIR WILLIAM BEAUVEDERE between the two windows (at side). A large conservatory at back. A piano, sofa, writing-table and chairs. As curtain rises, JULIET GAINSBOROUGH, a pretty girl about eighteen, well, but not gaudily-dressed, and ALICE GAINSBOROUGH, a Nun, evidently some years her senior, are talking earnestly together on a sofa.*

ALICE (*with anxiety*).

Dearest Juliet, you have not yet told me why you accepted Sir William.

JULIET.

(Who is opening letters and throwing them aside.)

Why? Because I wanted to be married, and wear a black velvet dinner-gown with a long diamond chain. . . . "Severe simplicity," as Mrs. Dasney would say, "and twenty thousand pound dangling from my neck!"

ALICE *(distressed)*.

Fancy marrying for such a reason!

JULIET.

Lots of girls do!

ALICE.

But you would n't.

JULIET.

Oh, well! I hope to make Bill happy. . . . *(Rising and going up to bust.)* . . . Alice, do you think he looks like a "Bill"? *(Points to bust.)* He ought to be a polysyllable! *(After a pause.)* Yes, I want to make him happy. *(All through this scene she is evidently labouring under despair and an assumption of cynicism.)*

ALICE.

And your own happiness?

JULIET.

That will come. I'm so grateful to him.

ALICE.

What has he done?

JULIET.

He gives me his love, his name, his career, his home,
his fortune. . . .

ALICE.

And why should n't he?

JULIET.

Look at me! I'm a girl without a penny, without influence, without a single great relative!

ALICE.

Grandpapa is a duke.

JULIET.

But he's only a duke because one of our ancestors in the eleventh century fought for God and his King! No one cares for that sort of thing now. Grandpapa is neither rich nor new; he hates politics; he won't even be a guinea-pig! He's just a fussy old country gentleman with a large family and a few rents. He's nobody!

ALICE.

Oh, Juliet! how you have changed since you came out!

JULIET.

(Stifling a sob.)

No, dear; I have n't changed. But, from the Convent window we used to watch the sea. And the sea — no matter how rough it may be — always reflects the sky. Now, I have left school. . . . I am watching the *earth* and that . . . *(Crosses to R. C.)*

ALICE.

Well? . . .

JULIET.

That, so far, seems to reflect . . . the other place! *(Covers her face with her hands.)* Oh, I am disillusioned!

ALICE.

Ah, no! *(Rises.)* Disillusions all come from within . . . from the failure of some dear and secret hope. The *world* makes no promises; we only dream it does; and when we wake, we cry! . . . Is Lady Beauvedere kind to you? *(Puts letters on piano.)*

JULIET.

All kindness. She gave me this frock; her maid does my hair; her newest genius is painting my portrait; her dearest friends will soon be mine. But . . .

ALICE.

What?

JULIET.

In her soul she cannot bear me.

ALICE (*moving towards Juliet*).

Juliet!

JULIET.

She thinks I am mercenary—I am not. She thinks I am frivolous—I am not. She thinks me vain, heartless, selfish—I am not. . . . I am not! (*She bursts into tears.*)

ALICE (*seating herself*).

She cannot be so unjust! Consider—she has invited you here to this beautiful place.

JULIET.

It is n't hers. It all belongs to Bill. That's why I feel an intruder. I am turning her out of her own home. As though I wanted it! I'd rather be a sparrow alone on a housetop than lead the life of these women of the world!

ALICE.

Are you so miserable ?

JULIET.

Can't you see that I am utterly wretched ?

ALICE.

Juliet, do you . . . do you love him ?

JULIET.

No ! no ! no ! I don't. But what shall I do ? He has been so good to me. I must love him in time. . . . Yet, that 's not all. . . . There 's more.

ALICE.

What else ?

JULIET.

There *is* a girl . . . who *does* love him.

ALICE.

Who 's that ?

JULIET.

Gwen Marleaze. I have just made this discovery. She 's not kind ; she 's proud, suspicious and cold ; she 's cruel, she 's worldly, but . . . she loves him. She would sell her soul for him. She 's suffering . . . she 's breaking her heart . . . she 's dying, I believe, of love.

ALICE.
Poor girl!

JULIET.
Then what . . . is to be done?

ALICE (*rising*).

Dearest, this engagement must be broken off. Misery . . . piercing misery will come of it. You will repent it — Oh, with what anguish! what desolation of heart!

JULIET.
Of course! Who ever heard of a pleasant, easy, enjoyable repentance!

ALICE.
Where is Sir William now?

JULIET.
At Berlin.

ALICE.
Then write to him. Write to him now, and let me post the letter. Tell him, that in your attempt to make him happy, you have made two people miserable already, and the third will be himself! Tell him it is impossible, and again impossible, and yet again, impossible!

JULIET (*with a cry of relief*).

Oh, Alice, that is just what I have been writing to him.

ALICE.

You don't mean it?

JULIET (*drawing letter from pocket*).

See, I wrote this this morning. (*Gives letter to ALICE.*) I dare n't tell you at first, till I knew what you thought. (*With emotion.*) I felt such a burden at home, and I knew it was my duty to feel grateful for Sir William's kindness! But I can't marry him — I cannot!

(*Enter JENKINS.*)

JENKINS.

The carriage is at the door, miss.

[*Exit JENKINS.*]

JULIET.

I'll come at once. (*Takes letter from ALICE.*) We can post this as we pass. (*Looking at calendar.*) This is Saturday. There is time — he will receive it (*sealing and stamping the letter*) before he leaves Berlin on Tuesday morning for the ball.

ALICE.

What ball?

JULIET.

The ball on Lady Beauvedere's birthday. (*Rises.*)
She's only thirty-five; that is n't much, and then,
she's beautiful.

ALICE.

Perhaps she will marry again.

JULIET.

I have heard that she is very fond of Lord St. Orbyn.

ALICE.

How do they know?

JULIET.

Because Mrs. Dasney says that he always tells
people, when her name is mentioned, that he is n't a
marrying man! But come, we shall be late.

ALICE.

We can post the letter together, and then . . . (*half
smiling and looking round the room*) . . . mind, it means
you renounce all this — all diamonds and all black
velvet.

JULIET (*passionately*).

I would n't take a whole city of such houses for even the least of the dreams I brought with me and lost here!

ALICE (*going to JULIET*).

The dreams will all come back again!

JULIET.

Do you think so?

ALICE.

I know it. Come!

[*Exeunt, as MRS. SPEARING, the housekeeper, followed by RORTER and TOMKINS, with a number of flower vases on a tray, enter.*

MRS. SPEARING (*to RORTER*).

Put the marguerites on that table. (*Points to c. table.*) Put that on the mantelpiece (*RORTER puts marguerites on c. table and other flowers on mantelpiece*)—the poppies on the piano (*TOMKINS puts poppies on piano*) and the lilies on the writing-table. (*Standing R. c., to RORTER.*) Look at that chair!

RORTER.

I am looking.

MRS. SPEARING.

What's the matter with it?

RORTER (*after a pause*).

One of us must be squinting!

MRS. SPEARING.

O, Rorter! Go to the liberry and bring up Sir Charles de Lorme's "History of Asia" — it is his day for calling.

[*Exit* RORTER.

(*To* TOMKINS.)

Why, bless my soul (*looking on writing-table for photograph*), where is Lord St. Orbyn's photograph? and him expected down every moment? There's management!

TOMKINS (*looking on piano*).

Here 'e is — be'ind the vase.

MRS. SPEARING (*taking photograph*).

Now, there's a man I could take to. Cold, 'aughty, you-keep-your-place-and-I'll-keep-mine; that's the style! That's a man to make 'ome happy. (*Hands it to* TOMKINS.) Don't put it on the writing-table — that's most conspicuous and indelicate! The pianner's the right place. Where are them cards? Ah, here they are. Her ladyship's wonderful fond of a game of Patience lately. It's so soothing when you're

sitting with a sword, so to speak, over your head!
(*Looks about the room.*) . . . And, oh, my goodness!
Tomkins!

TOMKINS.

Yes, Mrs. Spearing?

MRS. SPEARING.

Who's been and dusted half the marble off Sir
Williamses' bust?

TOMKINS.

It's Lady Gwendolene. Come in when I will she
is a-dusting of it fit to break her 'eart!

MRS. SPEARING.

Poor young lady!

TOMKINS (*putting things straight on piano*).

And 'as Sir William really be'aved so 'eartless to
her, Mrs. Spearing?

(*Re-enter RORTER with book, and "The Upper Ten."*)

RORTER (*who has evidently been listening at the door*).

Something shameful!

MRS. SPEARING.

(*Taking book from him and putting it on table.*)

Hold your tongue! What do you know about it?

RORTER.

You can read it for yourself in *The Upper Ten*. (TOMKINS looks at paper over RORTER'S shoulder.) 'Ere 's the column. "Things we should like to know." (Reads.) "What will become of a certain peer's daughter now that a certain Bart. has engaged himself to the penniless Miss What 's-her-name?" I call that pretty straight!

MRS. SPEARING.

I would n't read such low stuff. (*Approaching them.*) Let me see it with my own eyes. Be off,—both of you!

[*Exeunt RORTER and TOMKINS.*MRS. SPEARING (*seating herself*).

"A much-talked-of match is not finding favour in the right quarters. It seems an occasion for half-mourning." There's impudence and *radicalism*! "Lady Beauvedere is receiving congratulations on her stepson's engagement to Miss Juliet Gainsborough." Ah, poor thing, she is indeed!

(*Enter VIVIAN BEAUVEDERE, a precocious, delicate-looking boy, about eighteen, through the conservatory.*)

VIVIAN.

Oh, Speary, I am so depressed! (*Opens piano.*)

MRS. SPEARING (*rising*).

For pity's sake, Master Vivie, don't you go and fall in love too, and make us all unhappy!

VIVIAN (*turning over music*).

There's no danger. I see too much of women and their little ways. That's one advantage, after all, in being too delicate to go to school or Oxford. (*Begins to play a valse.*)

MRS. SPEARING.

I do hope that nice tune will liven up her poor ladyship. (*Goes out wiping her eyes.*)

(*As VIVIAN plays, LADY BEAUVEDERE, a very handsome, young-looking woman, about thirty-five, enters, followed by LADY GWENDOLENE, a girl about twenty-two, very intense, silent and languishing.*)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(*Crossing to VIVIAN, and placing her hands on his shoulder.*)

Darling boy, my mind is crowded with painful thoughts, yet, when you play, I can forget them all. You are my comfort. Never, never disappoint me. I could not bear it. (*Wipes her eyes.*)

VIVIAN.

(Rising from piano and arranging the cushions for her on the sofa where LADY BEAUVEDERE now sits.)

Why do you say that? It almost implies a doubt. You ought to feel sure of me.

GWENDOLENE.

(Who has seated herself at fancy-work, mournfully.)

Disappointments — like fate and love — will not bear to be too much talked about.

VIVIAN *(walking about)*.

Oh! I am so depressed. I do wish you would all smile again just as you used before Bill's engagement.

(LADY GWENDOLENE stifles a sob, rises suddenly, and leaves the room.)

LADY BEAUVEDERE *(looking after her)*.

Poor sweet girl! Her eyes were full of tears. Did you notice how pale she grew just at the mention of Bill's name? And yet your brother can forsake a heart like that for the sake of a little serpent in dove's feathers.

VIVIAN.

Oh, hang it all! A fellow can't marry every girl who gets pale every time his name is mentioned. There would simply be no end to it.

(*Enter JENKINS, bearing a saviour of letters.*)

Ah, the post! (JENKINS puts letters on writing-table.)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(*To VIVIAN.*) One moment. (*To JENKINS.*) Is Lord St. Orbyn still in his room, Jenkins?

JENKINS.

Yes, my lady. His lordship is still dressing, my lady. His lordship's servant led me to suppose that his lordship would not be down for a couple of hours.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

That will do. [*Exit JENKINS.*]

VIVIAN (*turning over the letters*).

What a heap! (*Seats himself.*)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(*Covering her eyes with her handkerchief.*)

Read them for me; my head is too bad.

VIVIAN (*opening the letters and reading*).

The Savignys accept. . . . The de Traceys are in mourning. . . . Lady Agnes and her bony girls. Soames hopes to find time. . . . What an ass! . . . (*Opens letter containing cheque; looks at LADY BEAUVEDERE, and*

quietly places cheque in pocket.) . . . *(After a pause.)*
Mama!

LADY BEAUVEDERE *(with her eyes still covered)*.

Yes, dear.

VIVIAN.

May I send a card to Hugo Lascelles?

LADY BEAUVEDERE *(with energy)*.

No! I have told you that I refuse to know him
— a gambler — a horrid wretch who lives on other
men's losses!

VIVIAN.

How ridiculous! We all do that — more or less!
He is a high-minded fellow as ever got up a baccarat
table.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Baccarat!

VIVIAN.

Well, you can't expect me to sit playing loto with
old Spearie in the housekeeper's room at my age!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Major Lascelles is so shocking that he can even
say witty things about his own bad character.

VIVIAN.

You think all the world of St. Orbyn, yet St. Orbyn is one of his greatest friends.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Lord St. Orbyn has a great official position, and he has to know many odd characters—for various reasons. One attends an Ambassador's parties as one goes to church—one has to rub shoulders with all sorts of people and be civil, after a fashion, to all of 'em.

VIVIAN.

But . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Not another word. . . .

(Enter JENKINS.)

JENKINS.

Lady Basler.

(Enter LADY BASLER, fashionably dressed. Exit JENKINS.)

LADY BASLER.

(Crossing the room and sitting on sofa near LADY BEAUVEDERE, who makes but a feeble attempt to rise. She plays the invalid all through the following scene.)

Dearest Geraldine! Don't move. How *are* you?
I am dying to hear about the engagement.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Oh, that engagement!

LADY BASLER.

Of course Bill is far too young—and fancy *you*
a possible grandmother! Dear Geraldine, *how* trying!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

In the first place, dear, a *step*-grandmother,— it is
not *quite* as though he were my own son, and then, I
married very young myself.

LADY BASLER.

But I want to know . . .

(*Enter* JENKINS.)

JENKINS.

Mrs. Dasney.

(MRS. DASNEY, *in a very elaborate gown, trips in.*

Exit JENKINS.)

MRS. DASNEY.

What luck! I was afraid you would n't be at home. I have just been to such a smart funeral this morning. I had barely time to get back and change into this. Everybody was there. (*VIVIAN places chair from piano for MRS DASNEY.*)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Whose funeral was it?

MRS. DASNEY (*in a hushed voice*).

Poor Milly's. (*Sits herself.*) I am *so* sorry you missed it. You would have enjoyed . . . I mean, you would have been so *interested*. Now, you have your *own* excitement. Fancy that naughty boy getting engaged! I hear that Miss Gainsborough is *too* pretty. What a mercy, dear, that she is n't third-rate!

LADY BASLER.

Third-rate women always try to be second-rate!

MRS. DASNEY.

And what is worse than a second-rate *manquée*? (*LADY BASLER is crushed.*) I suppose when Bill marries you'll have to give up all this? (*Looking round the room.*)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Of course, and go to my dower-house in Wiltshire,
among the Moon-rakers!

LADY BASLER.

I'm afraid I'm rather out of this conversation. I'll
move. (*Rises and goes up R.*)

MRS. DASNEY (*taking her place*).

Thanks so much. What I want to know is . . .

(*Enter JENKINS.*)

JENKINS.

Lady Vanringham.

(*Enter LADY VANRINGHAM; pretty, thin, helpless. Exit*

JENKINS.)

LADY VANRINGHAM.

Oh . . . I was hoping you would be alone . . . I
mean . . . don't get up. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*pointing to chair by sofa*).

Dear Harriet, do take this chair! So good of you.

LADY VANRINGHAM (*seating herself*).

Are you *awfully* upset?

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*wearily*).

Oh, no. Of course dear Bill is very young, but I married very young myself. . . .

LADY VANRINGHAM.

If they love each other what does it matter? The great thing is the girl. Is she a nice girl?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Oh, charming.

LADY BASLER.

Where's her photo, G.?

VIVIAN.

Bill has taken them all away with him to Berlin.

LADY BASLER.

How sweet of him! But I'm rather sorry that the poor girl is n't plain.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Why?

LADY BASLER.

Because a plain woman can defy the three cruellest enemies of her sex — Time, Sorrow — and Men's Fickleness!

MRS. DASNEY.

You've forgotten the fourth — the worst of the lot.

LADY VANRINGHAM.

What's that?

MRS. DASNEY.

The jealousy of rivals!

(Enter JENKINS.)

JENKINS *(announcing)*.

Sir Charles de Lorme.

(Enter SIR CHARLES DE LORME. Exit JENKINS.)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(Rising and shaking hands with SIR CHARLES.)

Dear Sir Charles, this is too nice.

(MRS. DASNEY moves up on sofa till she is R. of LADY VANRINGHAM; LADY BASLER sits L. of R. table. VIVIAN on stool below this table.)

SIR CHARLES *(lugubriously)*.

I have called to offer my congratulations.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Thanks so much. We are all so happy about the affair. Of course Bill is a little young, but I married very young myself, and it all seems so idyllic!

SIR CHARLES (*relieved*).

Really now. I am delighted, simply delighted! What a comfort that you are happy about it! (LADY BEAUVEDERE *sits on sofa where MRS. DASNEY sat before.*)

MRS. DASNEY.

She is not rich, but she is *quite* lovely, and he is *very* fond of her.

LADY VANRINGHAM (*with sentiment*).

And if the young people love each other, what *does* it matter?

SIR CHARLES.

It seems an ideal match in every respect. (*Seats himself.*) Miss Gainsborough is Bill's equal in birth, his superior in beauty, his junior in years. An ideal match!

LADY VANRINGHAM.

Who brought them together, dear?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

The Duchess of Hampshire.

MRS. DASNEY.

She is so tactless.

LADY BASLER.

Not at all. I believe she does it on purpose. She has a mania for marrying off poor orphans. I often wish my girls were orphans. They'd do so much better.

MRS. DASNEY.

I believe men like orphans . . . there's no mother-in-law. But I must be going. Goodbye, dear. (*Crosses the room, pauses, then returns to SIR CHARLES, c.*) Oh, Sir Charles, *do* let me drop you somewhere.

SIR CHARLES.

(*A little embarrassed, but not displeased.*)

That's very sweet of you, but . . .

MRS. DASNEY.

No, I insist! you know I *never* see you. (SIR CHARLES *tries not to look astonished at this remark.*) You need a blow in the Bois. And we can see the blossoms in bloom. Really! my life is such a whirl, that I'm a stranger — a perfect stranger — to the real pleasures of existence. (*Puts one hand on his arm as if to keep him quiet.*)

LADY BASLER.

But you *do* so much, don't you?

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*smiling, to save the situation*).
And does it all so beautifully!

MRS. DASNEY (*quickly*).

My husband is very hospitable; of course, entertainment for entertainment's sake is the most expensive form of death, and perhaps — (*hesitating*).

LADY BASLER.

Vulgar?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(*Rising and addressing Mrs. DASNEY.*)

Do come to lunch on Saturday.

MRS. DASNEY.

Awfully sorry — can't. In the morning I have the Armenian Massacres Committee, and in the afternoon I *must* decide on my gown for the Glossop Fancy Ball, and I lunch with . . . let me think — *who do* I lunch with?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

What a bore! Come Sunday.

MRS. DASNEY.

Delighted.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Bring your husband.

MRS. DASNEY.

Oh, no ; ask him when you don't ask me. We
are so dull together. Goodbye.

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*to SIR CHARLES*).

Dine with us on Sunday ?

SIR CHARLES.

Charmed.

MRS. DASNEY.

Sir Charles.

SIR CHARLES.

Charmed. (*Follows MRS. DASNEY out of the room.*)

LADY VANRINGHAM.

I must go too. Goodbye. But I *am* sorry to see you looking so poorly. But if the young people *love* each other, what *does* it matter ! It will be all right ; don't worry. (*Advancing and addressing LADY BASLER.*) Goodbye, Edith. I'm sure we all married for love. Even Dolly Dasney married for love ; and there's nothing the matter with us . . . we are happy enough. Goodbye.

[*Exit, followed by VIVIAN.*]

LADY BASLER (*looking after her*).

Poor Harriet! she's dear, but such a bore; and that dreadful Dasney woman! How she does chase after Sir Charles de Lorme! I call her such a bounder!

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*crossing to table*).

But she can make anything "go" . . . that's a rest! Everybody knows her — all Society. . . .

LADY BASLER (*sneering a little*).

Represented by the Duchess of Hampshire!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

All Propriety?

LADY BASLER.

Represented by yourself!

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*smiling a little*).

And all Impropriety?

LADY BASLER.

My dear! Now you *have* stumped me! (*After a pause.*) Well, darling, has St. Orbyn arrived?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Yes, he arrived last night. I have not seen him yet. It was so late.

LADY BASLER.

What a pity it is, dear, that St. Orbyn is not a marrying man! What a comfort he would have been to you . . . now that Bill is settling in life!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Oh, my dear! St. Orbyn and I are such friends as we are, that the idea of marrying him would seem almost . . . almost a pity.

LADY BASLER.

All the same he would have married you sixteen years ago!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

How can you say that — when you know my heart was buried with dear Basil?

LADY BASLER.

That, my dear, was a case of premature burial!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

What *do* you mean?

LADY BASLER.

Just what I say. St. Orbyn was dying to marry you sixteen years ago, when you were a widow of nineteen!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Yes . . . I was very young.

LADY BASLER.

And now, of course, Gerry dear, you are still young — in a way — but ten to one now St. Orbyn don't keep you for a friend because you are amusin', and marry some little noodle — because she's so fresh! That's the world! That's men! Take the case of Monty. How did Monty treat me?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

That's a certain type of man. St. Orbyn is quite different!

LADY BASLER.

They're all different, dear (*rises and crosses to LADY BEAUVEDERE*), till it comes to a question of marriage, and then they're all the same! But I must be going. Goodbye, pet. Don't come. I shall meet Vivie on the stairs.

LADY BASLER *goes out*. LADY BEAUVEDERE *moves to piano and looks at St. Orbyn's photograph, then sits down and sings* —

“Le doux printemps a bu dans le creux de sa main
Le premier pleur qu'au bois laissa tomber l'aurore;
Vous aimerez demain, vous qui n'aimiez encore,
Et vous qui n'aimiez plus, vous aimerez demain!”

ST. ORBYN.

(*Heard outside.*) Is Lady Beauvedere in the drawing-room? (LADY BEAUVEDERE rises and crosses to R.) I will join her at once. What delicious roses! May I steal one?

LADY GWENDOLENE (*appearing in doorway*).

Pray do. (*She disappears again.*)

(ST. ORBYN enters through the conservatory. He is a distinguished, rather blasé-looking man of about forty-five.)

ST. ORBYN.

My dear Geraldine, what a pleasure this is! (*kisses her hand*) I thought you so sensible not to sit up for me last night. My train arrived at the most uncivil hour. Ah, to get away from my work, and to come here to you — the enchantress — the irresistible! I am a boy in my happiness — a boy!

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*sitting*).

Dear Bertie, I am too happy to see you. To think that a whole year has passed since our last meeting!

ST. ORBYN (*lightly*).

What is a year? A little hunting, a little shooting, a little dancing, a little dining, a little racing, a little

losing, a little cursing, a little yawning, a little flirting, and — a little repenting! Why, a year is no more than a well-ordered day!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Can you keep a secret?

ST. ORBYN.

Give me several, and then, thank God! one will help me to keep the others!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Well, let me tell you this, the days seem long — only when I neither see nor hear from you!

ST. ORBYN.

What charming things you say!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

That's because I'm in practice.

ST. ORBYN.

How so?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I have just seen a lot of women callers. In a minute I shall sing "God save the Queen!" (*rising*).

ST. ORBYN.

What a mood is this!

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*reseating herself*).

Oh, don't you know that every dinner, every lunch, every call where women meet is a field of Waterloo?

ST. ORBYN.

Why?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Napoleon and Wellington settled their battle once and for ever, but women . . .

ST. ORBYN.

Well . . . ?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Waterloo begins, for a woman, from the moment she disappoints her mother by not being a boy, and it ends—only when her dearest friend drops a wreath on her coffin. (*Wipes her eyes.*)

ST. ORBYN (*approaching her*).

Dearest G., what's the matter?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Edith Basler is a cat, and yet she was my bridesmaid. But they are all horrid!

ST. ORBYN (*watching her intently*).

What about ?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

About Bill's engagement.

ST. ORBYN.

But I hear Miss Gainsborough is a delightful creature.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Ah, some woman told you that !

ST. ORBYN.

Several women have told me so. Some of 'em, too, had daughters of their own !

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Spiteful things !

ST. ORBYN.

Well, is n't Miss Gainsborough a delightful creature ?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Yes, but they need n't go about *telling* everybody, as though I were the only one who *did n't* think so !

ST. ORBYN.

Whereas I gather you are really in the best of spirits over the affair !

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Well, I do like her—in a way—but dear Bertie, she has faults. . . .

ST. ORBYN.

Faults! I *adore* faults! I can never find too many in any creature. And I'm sure a man without faults never yet pleased the women!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Ah, now we are coming to the point. That's my worry.

ST. ORBYN.

What?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Bill is so good, and such a dear in every way. . . .

ST. ORBYN.

While the little Gainsborough has perhaps a failing or two. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*eagerly*).

Ah, then you *have* heard of some. . . .

ST. ORBYN.

Not at all. A mere guess on my part. I hear her praises sung in every quarter. Really, G., you ought to be delighted.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I am . . . I am . . . !

ST. ORBYN.

The girl is pretty, her father was a distinguished soldier, her mother died before she could become distinguished. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Ah, then you have heard . . .

ST. ORBYN.

What?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

The story about her mother. You cannot deceive me. You have heard the story.

ST. ORBYN.

I have *nothing* to tell *you*, but you have *everything* to tell *me*.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I could tell you a good deal . . . my heart is too full to go on.

ST. ORBYN.

I am an old friend—you can cry before me! Besides, I always think a woman is all the prettier for crying.

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*absently*).

Juliet's mother was a fool! Every one says so.

ST. ORBYN.

No — no. There is only one fool in the whole of creation — and that is — an unmarried man! (LADY BEAUVEDERE *gives him a quick glance*.) Why do I keep single? Perhaps I love too many women too well — or, possibly, too many too little!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I wish you would be serious.

ST. ORBYN.

Believe me, I was never more serious.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I feel a strong temptation to tell you the whole story from beginning to end. . . .

ST. ORBYN.

I do not see any reason why you should resist that temptation.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

You would think me ill-natured.

ST. ORBYN.

Never.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Yes, you would.

ST. ORBYN.

Have your own way.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

You are so provoking to-day that . . . I forget half the things I wanted to speak of.

ST. ORBYN.

Then tell me how *Bill* speaks of his intended.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

He speaks of her as all young men going to be married do speak of their *fiancées*. One would think he had secured an angel of a girl!

ST. ORBYN.

Well, and has n't he?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Of course not. He is infatuated. Juliet is not the wife for a young man in official life. Bill needs some plain, earnest girl who would devote herself solely to his interests.

ST. ORBYN.

One, in fact, who would *please* the women by *boring* all the men!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Well, that is not a bad sort of wife for a young fellow with a career before him.

ST. ORBYN.

The Powers of Europe are getting sick of these devoted wives who think that governments can be dissolved by inviting the right people to a dinner, or the wrong people to a crush!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I know you are thinking of Sarah Hampshire!

ST. ORBYN.

No, I ain't. But, all the same, there is a tremendous demand now for simpletons — old school — white muslin — rose behind the ear — a bit of black velvet ribbon round the throat — nice throat — no past, no future — and Heaven our home! Bless 'em!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I should like to see you with a wife like that!

ST. ORBYN.

How I should worship her!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

You know you like witty women.

ST. ORBYN.

I love 'em, the darlings! but not to marry. Why, I'm a wit myself, or used to be! Imagine it! Two wits with but a single epigram — two jokes that pass for one! Good Lord! (*Rises and crosses the room.*) Let us talk about Bill.

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*rising*).

I want him to be happy. . . .

ST. ORBYN (*drily*).

Quite so!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

My fear is — that Juliet does not love the poor boy.

ST. ORBYN.

Ah, that's cynical!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I ask you, Bertie, would a pretty, young, lively girl care naturally for poor darling Bill? (*Points to bust.*)

ST. ORBYN.

Is that considered a good likeness? I have not seen him lately.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

If it were Vivian I could understand it, but . . . Bill is . . . not taking, in fact, he's stodgy! (*Crosses to R. and turns to him with a sentimental air.*) Gwen Marleaze has loved him ever since they played together as children.

ST. ORBYN (*approaching her*).

There's nothing like force of habit in these things! I knew a man who hated his wife when he married her, and after twenty-five years of wrangling, he would not have given her for Venus! That's a true story!

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*sitting on stool*).

But do you think dear Gwen is interesting enough to quarrel with?

ST. ORBYN.

No . . . I shouldn't call her a first-class fighting woman—and fighting certainly does appeal to the old Viking spirit of the Anglo-Saxon! (*Seating himself.*)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

That's all very well, but this gives me no comfort about Juliet.

ST. ORBYN.

You are vexed because I have not attacked her. Remember, I have not yet laid eyes upon the poor thing.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

She is very deep — quite impenetrable.

ST. ORBYN.

Nevertheless, I may not condemn a girl I have never met, because her mother — whom I never knew — nearly ran away with a man — I never saw!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Nearly ran away! Why, every one knows that if she had n't been thrown from her horse and killed that very morning — on her way to meet him . . .

ST. ORBYN.

I never attend post-mortems on a conscience!

(*Enter GWENDOLENE. ST. ORBYN rises and crosses room; LADY BEAUVEDERE approaches ST. ORBYN.*)

GWENDOLENE.

Dear Lady Beauvedere, the doctor is here. (*Advances to a sofa.*)

ST. ORBYN.

Go at once, Geraldine. Don't let me keep you. I have one or two letters to write.

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*preparing a seat at the table*).

Write them here—at my table.

ST. ORBYN.

I make it a rule never to write letters at another person's desk.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

What a fancy! Why not?

ST. ORBYN.

Well, once, when I was younger and more experienced than I am now, I was staying in the country with Lord Glevering when he was Foreign Secretary.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Dear Lord Glevering!

ST. ORBYN.

I sat at his table by his own invitation, and I wrote my letters. It happened, however, that without perceiving my mistake, I whipped up some of his private

papers which happened to be on the desk. He sought them high and low, the servants were questioned, the guests were perplexed. Four days after I found them in my own portfolio!

(GWENDOLENE, during this speech, moves down the room with "The Upper Ten" paper, and sits on sofa.)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

How awkward!

ST. ORBYN.

Ingenuously, I returned them — with my explanation! To this day I do not know what the documents were, but I am tolerably convinced that, also to this day, his Lordship thinks I did a very neat thing in a confoundedly impudent way!

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*laughing*).

After this I must insist on your using the table.

ST. ORBYN.

Well, if you insist, I must obey, but — I have a presentiment — a strong presentiment — that history may repeat itself.

(*He crosses to door, to open it for LADY BEAUVEDERE, who goes out. He returns to the writing-table, without perceiving GWENDOLENE, who is reading the paper.*)

GWENDOLENE (*reading aloud to herself*).

“A marriage is arranged and will shortly take place between Sir William Beauvedere, Baronet, and Juliet, youngest daughter of the late Colonel Gainsborough and the late Lady Georgina Gainsborough. All friends will join in wishing the young diplomatist and his beautiful young bride” . . . (*She bursts into tears.*) Oh, I cannot wish them happiness — I cannot !

ST. ORBYN (*dropping his pen*).

What is that? Is she crying? (*Advances towards her.*) My dear child, do you often cry ?

GWENDOLENE (*apparently confused*).

Oh, no . . . I am so sorry . . . it is nothing . . . really, nothing.

ST. ORBYN.

I knew it was nothing. I said to myself — why should she cry? A charming young girl with pretty eyes, devoted friends, and (*pointing to a brooch she wears*) even the moon — set in diamonds.

GWENDOLENE.

That was a present from Bill — on my coming of age. I always wear it.

ST. ORBYN.

He must feel flattered.

GWENDOLENE.

I don't think he notices it.

ST. ORBYN.

Leave it off for a few days . . . and try the rogue
— I know these puppies.

GWENDOLENE.

I am sure he would n't notice it. He is so absorbed in Miss Gainsborough. Have you met her yet?

ST. ORBYN.

I have not yet had that pleasure. When does she come back from her drive?

GWENDOLENE.

She went out with her sister.

ST. ORBYN.

Has she got a sister?

GWENDOLENE.

Oh, yes, her sister, the Nun. It is so droll to think that Juliet's own sister should have chosen a life of piety and sick nursing.

ST. ORBYN.

Why droll?

GWENDOLENE.

Juliet is so different.

ST. ORBYN.

And is n't she also a great deal younger?

GWENDOLENE.

True, and perhaps the elder sister wanted to clear the way for Juliet! I heard that Colonel Gainsborough could not afford to give both his daughters a dowry — it was small enough, goodness knows! for one, so Alice, being the plainer of the two, became a Nun. But people say such horrid things, don't they?

ST. ORBYN.

They do.

GWENDOLENE.

But I am interrupting your letters. . . .

ST. ORBYN.

Not at all, but I asked Vivian to come to my room for a chat. . . . Remember my advice about the brooch, and, *when the puppy comes back . . . don't wear it.*

GWENDOLENE.

I won't forget.

(ST. ORBYN goes out through conservatory. GWENDOLENE approaches bust, and is looking at it when JULIET enters and, without perceiving GWENDOLENE, runs across the room, opens window and waves her handkerchief, laughing loudly.)

JULIET.

(Speaking from window to some one outside.)

Ah, you are first, after all! But that is as it should be. Thanks so much. I am all right. I am so grateful. . . . Nonsense! How very absurd! How can you!

GWENDOLENE.

Juliet!

JULIET.

It is too amusing. I met Major Lascelles just as I was getting out of the carriage. It seems he lives over the way . . . that is his window. . . . (*Waving again.*)

GWENDOLENE.

Major Lascelles! That dreadful man!

JULIET.

What do you mean? He is n't dreadful. He's charming! He is one of papa's best friends. I have

known him all my life and am devoted to him. (*Waves again, kisses her hand, and closes the window.*)

(*The two girls look at each other defiantly. GWENDOLENE is standing by the writing-table. In her agitation she turns over a pack of cards. They all fall to the floor.*)

JULIET (*springing forward*).

Don't touch them. I'll tell your fortune. (*She stoops and turns them over.*) I see good news.

GWENDOLENE (*bitterly*).

For me?

JULIET.

A great surprise.

GWENDOLENE.

A sad one? . . .

JULIET.

No . . . a strange one. And look . . . there's hope.

GWENDOLENE.

Where?

JULIET.

From the poor two of spades!

GWENDOLENE.

That's the most trumpery card in the pack!

THE AMBASSADOR. Act I

JULIET.

It is the heart of things, does it? Sweet, I see
nothing.

GWENDOLENE.

There is your answer.

JULIET.

Will you think

GWENDOLENE.

It is the heart of things, does it? *Affecting not to care.* How
silly

JULIET.

I think I think in words

GWENDOLENE *(mechanically)*.

How silly

JULIET.

And the man is thin . . . tall . . .

GWENDOLENE.

Oh! *(Pretends indifference.)*

JULIET.

And good-looking . . . rather solemn. . . .

GWENDOLENE.

What card is that?

JULIET.

Oh, that . . . is n't on the card!

GWENDOLENE.

You're making it up!

JULIET.

I'm not. His hair is black; his eyes are dark; his nose is narrow; his chin is firm; he knows all the long words in every language!

GWENDOLENE.

That's absurd. I don't know a man at all like that. . . .

JULIET.

One always marries the most unlikely person! Now I must go . . . but, Gwen. . . .

GWENDOLENE.

What?

JULIET (*whispers in her ear*).

You'll see him perhaps at the ball! (*Picks up her parasol and runs out.*)

GWENDOLENE.

(Following JULIET up, stops; then with sudden feeling, to bust.)

Oh, did you hear that? Or, if you heard, would you care? (*Hurls the cards at SIR WILLIAM'S bust.*)
Would you care?

(*As she throws the cards, enter JENKINS to announce the PRINCESS VENDRAMINI. He hesitates a moment. Enter the PRINCESS VENDRAMINI, a handsome, worldly person, haughty in bearing, but well bred; emotional, rather affected; dressed in the height of fashion. She speaks with a slight Italian accent, expressing each syllable with care.*)

JENKINS (*announcing*).

Madame the Princess Vendramini.

(GWENDOLENE moves down L. C., looking away. JENKINS takes books off table C., and lays tea-cloth. RORTER enters with tea-tray, which he puts on table C. Both men lift the table a little further down. Then exeunt.)

VENDRAMINI.

Mon ange!

GWENDOLENE (*turning to the PRINCESS*).

Oh, is that you, Princess? (*Advances in tears.*)

VENDRAMINI (*kissing her on both cheeks*).

How pale! Did I startle you?

GWENDOLENE (*laughs hysterically*).

I was losing my temper. I do sometimes. . . .

VENDRAMINI.

Incredible!

GWENDOLENE.

I am but human.

VENDRAMINI.

Then why quarrel with Nature? We live to love,
to suffer, and to die!

GWENDOLENE (*with passion*).

I think I shall die soon — because I cannot die!

VENDRAMINI.

(*Waving her hand indefinitely toward the bust.*)

Why don't you go away from these associations?

GWENDOLENE

I *am* going — the day after the ball. I must see
him once more — once more, at least!

VENDRAMINI.

Then when you meet him — show your spirit. Re-proach him, threaten him, sneer at him, laugh at him — exasperate him!

GWENDOLENE.

That is not Lord St. Orbyn's advice.

VENDRAMINI (*biting her lip*).

Ah, then he has arrived?

GWENDOLENE.

Yes. And I believe that he is more fond of Lady Beauvedere than people think. I should n't wonder if, after all . . .

VENDRAMINI (*agitated*).

I say it is out of the question. He must n't marry Geraldine . . . it would be — oh, the word — give me the word!

GWENDOLENE.

Madness?

VENDRAMINI.

No, sentimentality! He may marry for hate, for money, for power, for independence, for despair, but never, never for sentimentality. I must stop this. (*Rises and paces the room.*)

GWENDOLENE.

How can you ?

VENDRAMINI (*agitated*).

We must distract him. Any woman rather than Geraldine — *any* woman !

GWENDOLENE.

But why ?

VENDRAMINI (*returning to c.*).

Because we have both known him for the same number of years !

GWENDOLENE (*softly*).

Dear Princess !

VENDRAMINI.

I am jealous.

GWENDOLENE.

I am so sorry !

VENDRAMINI.

I could bear *that*, but she has not the kindness, the tact, the *savoir faire* and *savoir vivre* to show the smallest jealousy of *me* ! It is insulting !

GWENDOLENE.

That 's the hardest part !

VENDRAMINI.

Naturally. Oh, if I could see her jealous! Is there no one? St. Orbyn is capricious, fastidious to a degree — past all calculations.

GWENDOLENE.

There is no one new or interesting here — except Juliet.

VENDRAMINI (*approaching to GWENDOLENE*).

Of course! But of course! *Juliet*. An inspiration! (*Sinks into a reverie.*)

GWENDOLENE (*frightened*).

You won't do anything . . . anything?

VENDRAMINI.

Mon ange, leave all to me. (*Crosses to L. and pauses.*)
Shed no more tears and go. (*GWENDOLENE hesitates.*)
Go. (*Stamps her foot.*)

[*Exit GWENDOLENE.*

(*THE PRINCESS laughs contemptuously, then stands listening as though for a footstep. She moves forward smiling as the door opens and ST. ORBYN enters.*)

ST. ORBYN (*astonished*).

My dear Princess! I know now that prayers are answered!

VENDRAMINI.

Why?

ST. ORBYN.

Are you not in Paris when I am in Paris?

VENDRAMINI.

We both come, I fear, on the same mission!

ST. ORBYN.

Amazing creature! Are you arranging another war?

VENDRAMINI.

In a way — yes. I have come to offer my congratulations on a friend's engagement!

ST. ORBYN.

Oh, that marriage! (*She shakes her head.*) What do you think?

VENDRAMINI.

Mon Dieu! (*Goes up to table and pours out tea.*)

ST. ORBYN.

Ah, I feared you would take that view — but I like a man who makes a fool of himself about a woman. (*Approaches the tea-table.*)

VENDRAMINI.

How you must hate yourself!

ST. ORBYN.

Why?

VENDRAMINI.

Because you merely let women make fools of themselves about *you!*

ST. ORBYN.

Ah, no, those days are over, dearest Princess. I had my faults, but now, in these matters, I am a child (*he hands her tea*)—any one could deceive me— even you. Try!

VENDRAMINI.

Oh no! I loved you once, but never again! It gave me three wrinkles, and no man on earth is worth even one.

ST. ORBYN (*piqued*).

Well, to flirt with spirit, one must be either too young to think or too wise to trust oneself to think.

VENDRAMINI.

I halt between the two conditions. I am not yet old, and not yet wholly wise. (*Sits in chair next piano drinking tea.*)

ST. ORBYN.

Amazing creature! Women should never be either old or wise. They were born to make men happy and each other jealous!

VENDRAMINI.

(Handing him her cup, which he places on tea-table.)

No. They were born to trust — and to be confounded! Will you never regard me seriously?

ST. ORBYN *(putting his own cup on table).*

I can't.

VENDRAMINI.

Why not?

ST. ORBYN.

Because you make me sad, and I'm only serious . . .

VENDRAMINI *(eagerly).*

When?

ST. ORBYN.

When I'm joking.

VENDRAMINI *(agitated and rising).*

Oh, you only see me in my lighter moods, listening to scandal, talking nonsense, grinning at this one's disappointment, sighing at that one's success, civil to men whom I distrust, distant to others I dare not — like! *(Going up to him.)*

ST. ORBYN.

Who is the fortunate man who has aroused your discretion?

VENDRAMINI.

Cruel. . . . But we are forgetting our poor friends.

ST. ORBYN.

An unpremeditated kindness on my part, I assure you!

VENDRAMINI.

Do you know, I have a little plan by which we may help them.

ST. ORBYN.

As unscrupulous as ever.

VENDRAMINI.

Listen. This girl — Juliet Gainsborough — is young, impressionable, ambitious. It would not hurt you to distract her attention, and she — no wiser than the rest of her sex — would be dazzled.

ST. ORBYN.

Act I., she is dazzled — and now Act II.?

VENDRAMINI.

Hoping for a better match, she breaks off her engagement with dear Bill.

ST. ORBYN.

Act III. ?

VENDRAMINI.

Well, you will be like the wise knight in the poem —

“ Adieu for evermore

My Love!

And adieu for evermore!”

ST. ORBYN.

Oh, I could n't find the heart to do it!

VENDRAMINI.

Heart is not required. You have done nothing
else all your life!

ST. ORBYN (*stopping her*).

Do you defy me — do you dare me?

VENDRAMINI.

I could never have believed you so backward in a
little intrigue.

ST. ORBYN (*seized by the idea*).

Gad! I'll do it!

VENDRAMINI.

But what?

ST. ORBYN.

If the girl's *not* worldly, she will come out of the adventure with flying colours. Why, now I think of it, I may even render her a service by proving to you all that she is sincerely, deeply, wholly in love with that prodigious bore — her inestimable Intended!

VENDRAMINI.

But, if, on the other hand, she is worldly — as I think her.

ST. ORBYN.

In that case, we shall both know how to wish each other *Goodbye*. I shall press her hand. I shall say — “For the last time.” . . . She will look at me. She will be clever enough to smile. I shall be clever enough to sigh. She will control a sob — I shall control a grin! I shall wish her — sincerely — every happiness. She will wish me — sincerely — to the devil! And there, dearest lady, the matter will end.

VENDRAMINI.

Oh, the wickedness of men!

ST. ORBYN.

Oh, the perfidy of women!

VENDRAMINI.

Albert.

ST. ORBYN.

Yes, Rosamund?

VENDRAMINI.

Has the wind ruffled my hair? (ST. ORBYN *draws near and examines her face and coiffure very carefully but without emotion.*) Well?

ST. ORBYN (*seriously*).

I think it's all right. (*Turns away from her.*)

VENDRAMINI.

Have I changed much since I was a girl?

ST. ORBYN.

Not a bit.

VENDRAMINI.

Don't you think I'm a good deal paler?

ST. ORBYN.

I hate a blowsy complexion. Yours was always delicate.

VENDRAMINI (*after a pause*).

Have n't you noticed that the expression of my mouth has altered? Some people say it has grown severe!

ST. ORBYN.

Let me see. No. I should never have dreamed of calling it severe. A shade malicious, perhaps. . . .
(*Looks at it in silence.*)

VENDRAMINI (*petulantly*).

Oh, Albert! you are too . . . (*Crosses the room and meets JULIET, who enters with a telegram in her hand, which she is reading evidently with much concern. She greets the PRINCESS mechanically. ST. ORBYN advances.*)

JULIET (*crossing to the PRINCESS*).

How do you do, Princess? Does Lady Beauvedere know that you are here? (*Going up to ST. ORBYN.*) This must be Lord St. Orbyn. I am Juliet Gainsborough. May I give you some tea?

ST. ORBYN (*much struck*).

Thank you, I have had my tea.

JULIET (*looking at telegram*).

This is from Bill. (*Crossing to table.*) He has got his leave earlier than he expected. He is now on his way from Berlin to Paris. (*Seems petrified with astonishment.*)

VENDRAMINI (*aside to ST. ORBYN*).

What do you think of her? (*He is too absorbed to reply.*)

JULIET.

I suppose Bill would not get any letter that was posted yesterday.

VENDRAMINI.

Of course not. But when he sees you he will not want letters.

JULIET.

But the letter would be forwarded?

VENDRAMINI.

Of course.

JULIET (*repeating*).

Oh, yes, . . . (*Seats herself.*) It will be forwarded. Will you excuse me for a moment? I must send for my sister. (*Writes.*)

ST. ORBYN (*looking at JULIET*).

So that is Juliet!

VENDRAMINI.

Yes . . . are you disappointed?

ST. ORBYN (*firmly but very quietly*).

Princess . . .

VENDRAMINI.

Well?

ST. ORBYN (*with quiet force*).

If I should ever say anything to her . . . if I should ever lead her to suppose that she was more to me than other women . . . (*with a pause*) . . . I say . . . *if* . . .

VENDRAMINI.

Yes? . . . Yes?

ST. ORBYN (*with point*).

If I said so — remember this: it would be in earnest. It would be for me — all the world to nothing. (*Quickly*) I say . . . (*after a pause*) . . . *if*.

JULIET (*to herself*).

Of course it would be forwarded.

VENDRAMINI (*to ST. ORBYN*).

What is the matter? Is this your first love?

ST. ORBYN (*staring*).

No — my last!

END OF FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE: *The conservatory at LADY BEAUVEDERE'S. Dim lights. A fountain (with goldfish) playing in the centre. Several couples in the conservatory. As curtain rises, walse music is heard. Some of the couples go back to the ball-room. Ball-room seen beyond. A small group of chaperons are near the front of the stage. LADY BEAUVEDERE, beautifully dressed, very elegant, adorned with few pearls, &c., stands by fountain. THE DUCHESS OF HAMPSHIRE in mauve brocade, lace lappets, diamonds, &c.; LADY BASLER, LADY ULLWEATHER, MRS. DASNEY, with an enormous tiara, very gorgeous, are seated on cane sofa and rout seats.*

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(Discovered L. C.; then crossing in front of fountain.)

I think, perhaps, we ought to go back to our posts.
(Looks about her anxiously.)

LADY ULLWEATHER.

(A languid, thin person with a drawl.)

You will never spare yourself or others, Geraldine.

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*vaguely*).

Do you know . . . I am afraid . . . I really must . . . if you don't mind. (*She goes out towards ball-room, peering about as if looking for some one.*)

LADY BASLER (*to* LADY ULLWEATHER).

Well, what do you think of the bride-elect?

LADY ULLWEATHER.

I really forget. One meets so many women nowadays.

DUCHESS (*seated on a couch*).

Oh, how true that is! If they're dull, I call on 'em during Lent; if they're pretty, I keep 'em for my parties at the *end* of the season; if they're rich, I'm civil to 'em all the year round; and if they're clever, I avoid 'em like the plague!

LADY BASLER.

How well dear Gwen Marleaze is bearing the disappointment! I admire her *so* much.

LADY ULLWEATHER.

So do I. (*Drowsily.*) What with her long, long arms — some people *admire* an arm like a pipe-stem — her amazing corpse-like complexion, and her large, mysterious mouth, I think her quite too fascinating!

LADY BASLER.

Oh, you wicked creature!

LADY ULLWEATHER.

Wicked? I assure you I admire her excessively. It is so difficult to describe a woman fairly. Words are so *bald*. By the bye, Edith, I did not see you at the Baron's wedding.

LADY BASLER.

I never go where I am not invited, but then *I* am peculiar.

DUCHESS (*very kindly*).

Not when one knows you, dear.

LADY BASLER (*after a pause*).

I cannot think why St. Orbyn does not settle down and marry poor old Rosamund Vendramini. Hers is a real affection.

LADY VANRINGHAM.

And if they *love* each other, what does it matter to *anybody*?

DUCHESS (*to LADY BASLER*).

My dear Edith, men of St. Orbyn's turn of mind don't want affection, they want amusement.

LADY BASLER.

Then why on earth don't he marry *Geraldine* ?

MRS. DASNEY.

Good Heavens! Rosamund couldn't stand that! She sooner would send him after Juliet Gainsborough. (*The DUCHESS looks at her; all stare at her for speaking — but she goes on undaunted.*) I wish he would fancy one of my poor sisters, but he won't (*sighs*) — he is too poetical.

LADY BASLER.

(*Addressing DUCHESS and ignoring MRS. DASNEY.*)

But he is not a poet in any ordinary sense, dear Duchess. I mean to say, he would n't be called *poetical* in his *tastes*. I once spent a day in the country with three poets . . . real poets . . . professionals . . . you know the sort of thing? I have clean forgotten what they *said*, but I know we had lumps of beef and dreadful pickles for supper!

DUCHESS.

How unwholesome! (*To MRS. DASNEY, who has risen.*) What's the matter? Are you leaving?

MRS. DASNEY (*crossing room*).

I'm rather tired. You see, I dined here! [*Exit.*

DUCHESS.

(Music stops. Looks at LADY BASLER, sighs, then rises as though very tired.)

I suppose we must go.

(DUCHESS goes up R. of fountain with LADY VANRINGHAM. LADY ULLWEATHER and LADY BASLER go up L. of fountain. Then all solemnly walk out abreast. Enter ST. ORBYN and JULIET.)

ST. ORBYN.

Stay a little longer. If this is Bill's dance, let him find you.

JULIET.

Yes. I wonder . . . *(pauses)* . . . Don't you think that letters which were sent to Berlin on Saturday and missed him ought to be here now?

ST. ORBYN.

I should think so. Why? *(Jealously.)* Are you still worrying about that letter?

JULIET *(confused)*.

Oh no, but — I wish he had it.

ST. ORBYN.

Don't let us think of Bill and his letters now. This is *my* hour.

JULIET (*as they stroll toward the fountain*).

It is certainly most pleasant here and cool . . .

ST. ORBYN (*looking at her*).

As an unplucked rose!

JULIET.

I have been reading your poems. They are very pretty, but each one of your two hundred and fifty sonnets is dedicated to a different woman.

ST. ORBYN.

Not at all. It is the same woman, but she has two hundred and fifty different moods!

JULIET.

Was she pretty — and did you love her very much?

ST. ORBYN.

Inexpressibly!

JULIET.

How unfortunate!

ST. ORBYN.

Why?

JULIET.

Because, in that case, she could never know . . .

ST. ORBYN.

Ah, she knows — she must know — she cannot doubt it.

JULIET.

How forward of her!

ST. ORBYN.

Why forward?

JULIET.

I think girls find it so hard, as a rule, to believe that they are really loved . . . by the man they . . . might (*meets his glance*) . . . respect.

ST. ORBYN.

You guess then that she is a *girl*?

JULIET.

Oh no; I was merely speaking — *as* a girl — about girls — in the vaguest way (*removing gloves*).

ST. ORBYN.

Do you like goldfish?

JULIET.

Yes, but I often wonder what they were made for!

ST. ORBYN.

Why, to look pretty and slip through our fingers — as women do.

JULIET.

I am afraid you have a hard opinion of women.

ST. ORBYN (*after a pause*).

Yesterday, when I was returning from my ride in the Bois, I looked up and said — that is either her face or a lily in the window!

JULIET.

I was only standing there scattering cake to the birds.

ST. ORBYN.

Happy birds to have the unhappy cake dropped by those beautiful hands!

JULIET.

Perhaps it was a lily in the window!

ST. ORBYN.

And that very lily, I swear, is the one thing on earth I ever loved, or could love — that I ever believed in, or could believe in.

JULIET.

So much feeling . . . just for a flower?

ST. ORBYN.

How can I praise more plainly what I love so deeply — so desperately — so wrongly — and so rightly?

JULIET (*surprised*).

Wrongly?

ST. ORBYN.

Yes . . . because . . . because, having found this star of stars. But why should the star care for the moth?

JULIET.

Is she a star now?

ST. ORBYN.

Yes . . . she is everything! So, having found her, I propose to keep her against all comers — all pretended owners — against the whole world!

JULIET.

I don't suppose . . . the flower . . . I mean, the star . . . I mean, the girl . . . would mind . . . (*Moves down L., then turns towards ST. ORBYN.*)

ST. ORBYN (*following her*).

Ah, Juliet, I must love you in any case . . . but, may I? (*She turns toward chair.*) I wish . . . I dare not say all I wish . . . yet, you will guess. This engagement to Bill is a mistake . . . an error . . . a crime! You don't . . . you cannot love him. . . . (*Watches her face.*)

JULIET (*agitated*).

I think . . . I don't wish to love any one. . . . Love makes me afraid. . . . Oh, I was happier before!

ST. ORBYN.

Before what?

JULIET.

Before . . . when I was only wondering what it meant.

ST. ORBYN.

Do you know *now*?

JULIET.

(*Speaking rather to herself than to ST. ORBYN.*)

I . . . guess . . . and I say — no, no! Let me be as I was. Let me dream — dreams were best.

ST. ORBYN.

All my life I have been waiting to meet you . . . looking out for you . . . hoping, despairing, and again

hoping. At last you come, and not too late. You never shall belong to any one else! (*Taking her hand.*) Juliet, would you mind if you did n't?

JULIET.

Your love is one of the things I would most wish for . . . but these things never happen. (*Rises.*)

ST. ORBYN (*following her*).

It has happened. I do love you. I have known you but five days, yet my destiny is in these little hands. (*Kisses them.*)

JULIET.

Only five days!

ST. ORBYN.

And the whole world was made in six! I recognised you at first sight. This, I said, is the one . . . (*taking both her hands*) . . . this is my future wife!

JULIET (*withdrawing both her hands*).

Oh, wait — wait — are you in earnest?

ST. ORBYN (*passionately*).

Cannot you see that I mean every word?

JULIET.

You may mean them — for the minute — but I must remember them — for ever! You see, there's a difference!

ST. ORBYN.

My dearest Heart! I swear that my whole life depends now upon your answer.

JULIET (*taking and pressing his hand to her cheek*).

Oh, how happy I could be, if I *might* be! (*Holds his hand.*) I shall think of you often — and that means — always!

ST. ORBYN.

What is this? Not tears? . . . Why tears?

JULIET.

You must n't think of *me*. I am poor and unimportant. I have no great relatives. The world would call it a wild marriage. The world would laugh at you and strike me! Oh, I have met the world so often during the last two weeks.

ST. ORBYN.

Not the world — but his scarecrows!

JULIET.

Oh, I should be your stumbling-block!

ST. ORBYN.

My stumbling-block! You mean my crown — the prize of life! These other notions are fancies.

JULIET.

They are not fancies. What did people think about my engagement to Sir William? And they would say of you — St. Orbyn has married at last, — a little thing without a shilling; she's young and silly; she's a blight on his career!

ST. ORBYN.

Who cares? Dearest, every man — even the most cynical — has one enthusiasm — he is earnest about some one thing; the all-round trifler does not exist. If there is a skeleton — there is also an *idol* in the cupboard! That idol may be ambition, love, revenge, the turf, the table — but it is there. Now *I* am flippant.

JULIET.

Are you?

ST. ORBYN.

At times. But, on my honour, I have it in me to be scorched, snubbed, and shelved for the sake of the woman I loved. (*Rises.*) As for the world — the less a man considers it, the better it will treat him.

That's my experience. I will please *it* if possible, but my own heart at any rate!

JULIET.

Oh, you speak like my dreams!

(Enter SIR WILLIAM. *He is pompous, well-bred, evidently good-natured, and self-satisfied.*)

SIR WILLIAM.

Oh, there you are! (*He shows no sort of suspicion. To JULIET.*) I think this must be our dance. I am sorry to be so late, but a host, on these occasions, is expected to be here, there, and everywhere. I know you will forgive me.

JULIET.

Oh, of course. I . . . I . . . did n't really expect you, but . . . Oh, see . . . (*holding up her sash*), when I was playing with the goldfish I splashed some water on my sash.

SIR WILLIAM.

How careless!

JULIET (*crosses the room*).

I am afraid I must change it before I go back to the ballroom. I sha'n't be long. Do you mind?
(ST. ORBYN *hands her her gloves.*)

SIR WILLIAM (*wiping his brow*).

There's no hurry. I shall be glad to have a little chat with St. Orbyn. (JULIET *goes out*.) I have not had a moment with you since I arrived. I always say, if you want to see your friends, meet 'em at some one else's house — not your own! (*Moves over to sofa*.) Between ourselves, I am very worried.

ST. ORBYN.

Why?

SIR WILLIAM (*seating himself*).

I'm in a cursed hard position.

ST. ORBYN.

How amusin'!

SIR WILLIAM.

Oh no; nothing is amusing that can lead to hysterics and fainting fits! You don't know what it is to have two or three women wrangling about one.

ST. ORBYN.

No! Perhaps not!

SIR WILLIAM.

Mama is drinking quinine by the pint, and Gwendolene is shooting out her eyes at me at every turning. What is to be done?

ST. ORBYN.

That's the very thing, no doubt, that everybody is asking.

SIR WILLIAM.

I'm devoted, as you know, to mama. She has sacrificed her whole life to Vivian — and myself. She was left a widow at nineteen.

ST. ORBYN.

And what a pretty creature she was too!

SIR WILLIAM.

She might have married again (*with a long look at St. ORBYN*) . . . but she did n't. Well, on one side I see this noble self-sacrifice, on the other I am driven to ask myself whether this affection for Juliet is a passing and violent fancy. You will own that Juliet has charm?

ST. ORBYN.

Yes . . . *great* charm!

SIR WILLIAM.

But the women — my stepmother's friends, women of high breeding and culture and experience — seem to detect in Juliet a certain note of satire — as though she rather laughed at one — which they say augurs ill

for married happiness. Now I cannot disguise from myself . . .

ST. ORBYN.

No, disguise nothing!

SIR WILLIAM.

Juliet has ideas. She says she would die for them.

ST. ORBYN.

Why not? To *die* for one's great ideas is glorious — and easy. The horror is to *outlive* them. That is our worst capability.

SIR WILLIAM (*annoyed at the interruption*).

Now, I ask you, as a man of the world, do you believe in the general *workableness* of love at first sight.

ST. ORBYN.

I've known instances of it . . . among my own intimate acquaintance, in fact! One cannot dogmatise on the subject. Sometimes it answers, and sometimes — it does n't!

SIR WILLIAM.

I suppose it is just one of those things which happen.

ST. ORBYN.

If it turns out badly, no one talks of anything else.

SIR WILLIAM.

And if it turns out well . . . ?

ST. ORBYN.

They won't take the smallest interest in the matter. Those who have made unhappy marriages walk on stilts, while the happy ones are on a level with the crowd. No one sees 'em!

SIR WILLIAM.

I cannot think that the anxiety of the last few weeks points to a peaceful issue. I have a little burden on my conscience too!

ST. ORBYN.

Your conscience! This means, of course, that somebody somewhere is crying!

SIR WILLIAM.

How did you guess?

ST. ORBYN.

I always associate a man's conscience with a woman's tears. They are inseparable.

SIR WILLIAM.

I begin to wonder if I have acted well towards Gwendolene.

ST. ORBYN.

You certainly grew up together with the notion of pleasing your parents by marrying.

SIR WILLIAM.

She has behaved in the most touching manner — not a reproach — but, little things tell! She no longer wears a small gift I gave her — a trifle — *a moonstone brooch*.

ST. ORBYN.

Ah!

SIR WILLIAM.

Every time I see her now, I miss it, and it is as though a certain light had gone out of my life.

ST. ORBYN.

I attach, as you do, *immense* importance to the brooch episode!

SIR WILLIAM.

I am glad you agree with me. That simple, un-studied act, I assure you, has cut me to the heart more deeply than any scene, any appeal could ever have done. It is by these means — so artless and so infinitely pathetic — that women conquer us.

ST. ORBYN.

True. Oh, how true!

SIR WILLIAM.

Turn over my difficulty in your mind. See — on the one side the unswerving love of Gwendolene.

ST. ORBYN (*working on his sympathy*).

The friendship of your childhood, the affection of your more mature years.

SIR WILLIAM.

She is not pretty . . . she is not accomplished. . . .

ST. ORBYN.

But she is good. She has fine eyes, and then — she's fond of you!

SIR WILLIAM.

Very!

ST. ORBYN.

On the other side . . . ?

SIR WILLIAM.

There is a fancy, perhaps a purely physical infatuation. I say perhaps. . . .

ST. ORBYN.

Nothing more likely. Take that for granted.

SIR WILLIAM (*sighing*).

While Juliet herself is, I must say, extremely cold,
with all her lively airs.

ST. ORBYN.

Personally, I should not hesitate for a moment.
(*Rises.*)

SIR WILLIAM (*rising*).

Then what would you do?

ST. ORBYN.

Do! I would take the woman I wanted, of course!

“Gather the rose of love whilst yet 't is time,

Whilst loving thou mightst loved be . . .”

and so on!

SIR WILLIAM (*sighing*).

Yet . . . how delightful she is!

ST. ORBYN.

Which of 'em?

SIR WILLIAM.

Why, Juliet, of course!

ST. ORBYN (*seeing his hesitancy*).

Ah, but think of that other poor girl! Think of
Gwendolene — her sleepless nights — watching the
sun rise and the moon come out. . . .

SIR WILLIAM.

Awful!

ST. ORBYN.

Think of her silent tears! How she has shared in thought and hope every step in your career. Ah, never play with hearts! And then think of her eyes — those mournful eyes full of a great, uncomplaining, ever-devoted love. Upon my word, it would move a Don Juan to fidelity!

SIR WILLIAM.

Well, I hope I'm not a Don Juan! But I grant Gwendolene's claim. And, after all, Juliet told me at the beginning that she did not love me.

ST. ORBYN (*relieved*).

Ah, she told you that, did she?

SIR WILLIAM.

(*Taking ST. ORBYN's arm and walking with him.*)

Yes, with the most amazing candour. I confess I was piqued — deucedly piqued! At the time, I put it down to coquetry, but since my arrival here she has been more distant than ever. We have hardly exchanged a word.

ST. ORBYN (*with veiled sarcasm*).

But then, your stepmother has naturally monopolised you to the exclusion of others!

SIR WILLIAM.

True. When I saw my stepmother — I had not expected such a change — I felt I ought, in duty, to knock under.

ST. ORBYN.

My dear Bill, you are right. A broken engagement is a pity, but a wretched marriage is a joke — a hideous, hellish joke! Don't submit the most serious action of your life to the judgment of a parcel of old women, who only think of the presents they have had engraved with your wife's monogram!

SIR WILLIAM.

That's all very well, but they rule the set, you know. If they don't happen to like a woman, they can make it very disagreeable for a fellow.

ST. ORBYN.

I suppose they can — given the fellow!

SIR WILLIAM.

All the same, your advice is excellent (*both walk up stage*), and I am wholly of your opinion, but — how . . . in the world . . .

ST. ORBYN.

Ah, Princess!

(*Enter the PRINCESS VENDRAMINI and LORD LAVENSTHORPE.*)

SIR WILLIAM.

I will leave you. [*Exit with LAVENSTHORPE.*]

VENDRAMINI (*to ST. ORBYN.*).

Well, have you been happy this evening?

ST. ORBYN.

Your presence casts a spell over my memory. Now, at last, I am in bliss; I forget all that I was, or have been!

VENDRAMINI (*seating herself*).

Your compliments are a two-edged sword; they hurt both of us!

ST. ORBYN.

I deserve my wounds. And you, Rosamund . . . ?

VENDRAMINI.

I own I am not blameless.

ST. ORBYN.

It is so hard to know when you speak in mockery and when you speak in earnest.

VENDRAMINI (*laughing bitterly*).

Do you think that any woman can be in earnest when she refers to her own shortcomings? But, speaking of faults, what do you think now of little Gainsborough?

ST. ORBYN.

She has eyes like woods of autumn, and a voice like the west wind among roses!

VENDRAMINI.

Little minx! Why don't you trust me, and speak out? Madame de Savigny and Princess Zoubaroff both say . . .

ST. ORBYN (*sitting R. of her*).

No names! Mention no names, I entreat you. The one safe theme in diplomatic circles is Ancient History. Talk of Cæsar, George IV., Henry VIII., or Queen Anne, and mean . . . whom you please. But don't speak of your friends — friends with whom we dine, have dined, and hope again to dine.

VENDRAMINI.

I believe that little thing has bewitched you! Gwen Marleaze told me as much just now.

ST. ORBYN.

Poor Gwen! She is youngish, prettyish . . .

VENDRAMINI (*tartly*).

And foolish!

ST. ORBYN (*thoughtfully*).

It is a great embarrassment, but there seems no lively way of describing the virtues!

VENDRAMINI (*peevishly*).

The virtues are n't women at all.

ST. ORBYN.

What are they?

VENDRAMINI.

Allegories.

ST. ORBYN.

Your sex, then, consists of the Graces, the Muses, and the Dowdies!

VENDRAMINI.

You sha'n't change the subject! I call Gwen Marleaze a cat! Upon my word, I would sooner Bill married Juliet after all.

ST. ORBYN.

There I can't agree with you. The more I see of Miss Gainsborough, the more I feel convinced that Sir William is *not* the man to make her happy!

VENDRAMINI.

Nonsense!

ST. ORBYN.

But he could never appreciate her: that shy, delicate humour; that innocent roguery . . . that pearly flesh tint round the chin!

VENDRAMINI.

Mon Dieu! The flame this time has been extinguished by the moth! She has got the better of you. Who would have believed it! She has fooled you!

ST. ORBYN.

Not at all. You will not deny that she is just nineteen. *You* will know, because I think she told me you were present at her christening.

VENDRAMINI (*falling into the trap*).

Nineteen! She is *not* nineteen. She is barely seventeen . . . if that. . . .

ST. ORBYN.

Delighted to hear it! Again, you own she is lovely to look at?

VENDRAMINI.

I admit she possesses certain attractions of a superficial kind.

ST. ORBYN.

Exactly. A fine complexion, beautiful hair, and pretty features are unquestionably on the surface. I thank my stars they are! One would not be well advised to take them, like the soul, for granted! (*Rises and moves c.*) But come, can you resist this music?

VENDRAMINI.

I could resist the music . . . but you—alas! (*Sighs.*)

ST. ORBYN.

Shall we go?

(*She accepts his arm, and they return to the ball-room as SIR WILLIAM and JULIET enter by R. arch; JULIET is carrying some letters.*)

JULIET (*to SIR WILLIAM*).

As I was passing through the hall, I found these letters. They are from Berlin. I thought they might be important. There is one I sent on Saturday, which missed you. I should like you to read it.

SIR WILLIAM.

Why read it when you are here yourself? I can read this at any time—when I am alone.

JULIET (*in a low voice*).

I would rather you read it now, because it is really rather important.

SIR WILLIAM (*peevishly*).

I tell you, I am not in the mood. I am greatly distressed about Mama and one or two other things. I am not myself. . . . I . . .

(*Enter VIVIAN hurriedly, pale and greatly agitated.*)

VIVIAN (*to SIR WILLIAM*).

Bill! I must see you at once. It is a matter of life and death. Please leave us alone, Juliet.

SIR WILLIAM (*pompously*).

This is absurd. What is the matter? I cannot go into it now. I can conceive of nothing so inopportune!

JULIET.

Do see him, Bill. I can wait here. I shall like resting. (*Putting her hand on his arm.*) Be kind to him, won't you? (*She glides away to the side and sits up L.*)

SIR WILLIAM (*to VIVIAN*).

Well, what is it? (*Crosses and sits on couch.*)

VIVIAN (*standing over* SIR WILLIAM).

I'm in the most awful fix. You know Hugo Lascelles?

SIR WILLIAM.

I have heard of the person.

VIVIAN.

He's been very decent to me. . . . He let me play cards with him.

SIR WILLIAM.

Indeed!

VIVIAN.

Just at first I won a good deal.

SIR WILLIAM.

Well?

VIVIAN.

Then I began to lose . . . a good deal more than I won.

SIR WILLIAM.

Of course! Well . . .?

VIVIAN.

You know Mama has been too ill to read her letters lately. The other day a cheque came from Didcomb for £500. It so happened that I put it in my breast-pocket.

SIR WILLIAM.

Well . . . ?

VIVIAN.

Last night I lost £500 to Lascelles.

SIR WILLIAM.

Lost £500! . . . Good Gad! . . . Good Gad!
(*Stands up.*) . . . Good Gad!

VIVIAN.

What is the use of Good Gad-ing about the place?
I thought I should win it back in no time . . . so I
played again this afternoon. I lost more . . .

SIR WILLIAM.

Well?

VIVIAN.

There were several fellows there . . . I had prom-
ised Lascelles the money. So . . . without meaning
it . . . I thought of the cheque.

SIR WILLIAM.

Go on!

VIVIAN.

Well . . . I endorsed it in Mama's name . . . and
gave it him.

SIR WILLIAM.

You mean to say you forged Mama's name?

VIVIAN.

I tell you I didn't mean to do it. It was one of those sudden impulses. . . . It just came into my head. . . . I tell you it seemed the only way out of the scrape. I thought you would n't mind paying in the money to Mama's account, so that she would n't miss it. I have acknowledged the cheque to Didcomb. He's all right. I can arrange the details later . . . but . . .

SIR WILLIAM.

You expected me to be a party to this abominable deception . . . *me!* (*Paces the room.*)

VIVIAN (*following him*).

I'll pay it all back again — honour bright — when I come of age. What's a little beastly five hundred pound to you? I don't ask it for my sake either, but for her — to save her — when she is so ill and worried about you. You might be willing to spare her the disappointment about me. She would n't mind the money. It's the way I've got it. She told me to break off with Lascelles — but she told *you* to break off with *Juliet* . . .

SIR WILLIAM.

(Springing to his feet indignantly.)

Not another word!

VIVIAN.

I say it is n't so easy as it seems to go about breaking off. You might be decent for this once and pay the money — and jaw, if you like, afterwards.

SIR WILLIAM *(after some hesitation)*.

No. On principle! No!

VIVIAN.

I say, you don't mean that? You're an awfully good-hearted chap, really.

SIR WILLIAM.

This flattery is nauseating. I say Mama has indulged you to the most absurd degree. Let her observe the disastrous effect of a fond bringing up.

VIVIAN *(half in tears)*.

What is the good of going on like this? Lascelles, I tell you, has got the cheque. He will pay it in tomorrow morning.

SIR WILLIAM.

Tell me no more about it. On principle, I wash my hands of the matter.

VIVIAN.

Then I shall blow my brains out — that's all!
(*Excited.*)

SIR WILLIAM.

These vulgar threats, my dear Vivian, are unavailing.

VIVIAN.

But I tell you . . .

SIR WILLIAM.

Silence, I say. Here is your wretched mother.

(*Enter LADY BEAUVEDERE.*)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Bill, Vivian, surely you have partners. You cannot be spared from the ball-room. Several of the best dancers have left already. I believe that dreadful Major Lascelles is giving a party himself this evening, merely to vex me and entice away my men.

SIR WILLIAM.

I find it hard to believe that any of your friends would prefer Lascelles' society to ours. But (*with a*

pointed glance at VIVIAN), one can be sure of nothing.
(*To LADY BEAUVEDERE.*) I will come with you.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(*Taking SIR WILLIAM's arm.*)

Come, dear Vivie.

VIVIAN.

I'm coming . . . in a minute.

(*LADY BEAUVEDERE and SIR WILLIAM go back to the ball-room. VIVIAN remains staring after them.*)

VIVIAN.

All right . . . I say, all right. (*Takes a small pocket-pistol from his pocket.*) I'm not such a fool as I look. I know the quickest way out of every scrape. (*Handles the pistol.*)

JULIET.

(*Rushing forward from her place of semi-concealment.*)

Vivian! What are you doing?

VIVIAN (*hiding the pistol*).

I was . . . just thinking, that's all.

JULIET (*embarrassed*).

Vivie . . . I could n't help hearing . . . some of the things. . . . Bill talks rather loud, and I was so

afraid lest some one else should hear, that I nearly interrupted him.

VIVIAN (*buskily*).

Don't be sorry. Every dog has his day. I've had mine . . . I've had a very good time, take it all round. I ain't complaining.

JULIET (*moving near to him*).

I wish I could help you. I have n't a penny of money myself, but Major Lascelles would be kind, I know, if you asked him.

VIVIAN.

Ah, you don't know Lascelles.

JULIET.

Oh yes, I do!

VIVIAN.

You do!

JULIET.

I've known him ever since I can remember.

VIVIAN (*apparently struck with an idea*).

Does he like you?

JULIET (*simply*).

I think so.

VIVIAN.

Would you have the pluck to . . . no, you would n't. . . .

JULIET (*eagerly*).

Yes, I would . . . but what for?

VIVIAN.

He will do nothing for men. He is as hard as the devil with men, but they say he will do any mortal thing for a pretty woman.

JULIET.

You want me to ask him not to present that cheque?

VIVIAN.

That's it. What a clever girl you are, after all!

JULIET.

I'll write him a note in the morning.

VIVIAN.

A note . . . that won't do . . . you must *see* him.

JULIET.

Very well, then I'll go and see him to-morrow.

VIVIAN.

But . . . to-morrow will be too late. You must go to-night.

JULIET.

To-night! Why, it's nearly three o'clock already.

VIVIAN.

Ah, I knew you would n't have the pluck! But, think how easy it will be. He has a party this evening.

JULIET.

Yes.

VIVIAN.

So . . . I know you will find him at home.

JULIET.

Yes.

VIVIAN.

You can get out through that gate. (*Points to conservatory door.*)

JULIET.

Yes.

VIVIAN.

Run across the garden to his house.

JULIET.

I see.

VIVIAN.

Send up your name on a card.

JULIET.

Yes.

VIVIAN.

Ask to see him . . . and tell the concierge that you have an appointment.

JULIET.

Well . . . what else?

VIVIAN.

He'll see you, be quite sure of that. *Make* him give you back the cheque into your own hands. Don't come away *without* it.

JULIET.

I'll do it.

VIVIAN.

You will!

JULIET.

I'll do it . . . not for you — but, for your mother.

VIVIAN.

Ah, you would n't like to see her heart broken, would you?

JULIET.

I say I will do it on her account. Have you got the key of the garden gate?

SCENE 5. [Exit]

Alone.

SCENE 6.

[Exit]

[Exit]

[Enter] I run around holding
[Enter] *the key.*

[Exit]

[Enter] *to door and open it.*

[Enter] When I come back?

[Enter] If any one were:

[Enter] *to open him to door.*

[Exit]

[Enter] We never caught

[Enter] I get across the gate

[Enter] *to door.*

[Enter] I get across the gate

[Enter] *to door.*

[Exit]

[Enter] *to door.*

VIVIAN (*taking it from his pocket*).

Yes, I use it . . . rather often.

JULIET.

Oh, Vivie!

VIVIAN.

My dear girl, a man can't run around holding his mother's hand all day! (*Gives her the key.*)

JULIET.

Quick! quick! (*He moves to door and opens it.*) Will you wait here to let me in when I come back? Oh, Vivie, it is very dangerous . . . if any one were to see me, how could I explain? (*Follows him to door.*)

VIVIAN.

They won't see you. They've never caught me yet. Make haste.

JULIET.

I see the way now . . . straight across the garden through the gate. (*She puts scarf round her head.*) Oh, Vivie, why did you do it? Your poor mother!
(*She darts out, and he closes the door. At this moment the music ceases. The couples pour in. Among them is GWENDOLENE, looking very pale, on SIR WILLIAM'S arm, followed by LADY BEAUVEDERE.*)

GWENDOLENE.

I feel a little faint. . . . Could you take me to the door? . . . The air . . .

SIR WILLIAM (*opening the door*).

There . . . are you better, dear Gwendolene?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Fetch her my salts — quickly.

[*Exit SIR WILLIAM.*]

GWENDOLENE.

Thank you . . . so much better . . . (*She lifts her head, looks out into the garden, suddenly seems amazed, rubs her eyes, seizes LADY BEAUVEDERE'S arm.*) Lady Beauvedere, do you see that white figure? . . . running . . . is . . . look quickly. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*peering*).

Where, Gwen? . . . It is . . . !

GWENDOLENE.

Can it be . . . Juliet? Where is she going?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Where *is* she going?

GWENDOLENE.

There are lights in Major Lascelles' windows. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

What has *she* to do with Major Lascelles?

GWENDOLENE.

She met him this morning. . . . I caught her waving to him from the drawing-room.

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*quickly*).

Not a word of this to Bill. . . . Leave it all to me.
. . . Not a word. . . . (*She goes out into the garden.*)

(SIR WILLIAM *returns with the smelling-bottle.* GWENDOLENE *closes the door hurriedly.*)

SIR WILLIAM (*anxiously to GWENDOLENE*).

Are you better?

GWENDOLENE (*smiling*).

So *much* better!

END OF SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE : *At MAJOR LASCELLES' residence in the Champs Elysées.*

TIME : *About 3 a.m. Room furnished in the Renaissance style: heavily gilded ceiling, dark wood chairs; prevailing tints, gold and blue and red. As curtain rises great noise of laughing and chattering. Supper table is seen with remains of very elaborate supper. About six guests besides LASCELLES himself. Four are women. As curtain rises MISS KATIE and MISS YOLANDE TAYLORSON, two young girls, with hair down their backs, dressed fantastically in accordion-pleated baby dresses, are standing in front of supper table wrapt in contemplation of a song being sung by TOTO, a young man, accompanied by MISS MAMIE TAYLORSON, the eldest daughter of MRS. TAYLORSON. MRS. TAYLORSON, an elderly lady very weary, in black silk of the utmost respectability, watches her daughters with pride. This group to convey an impression of candid vulgarity as opposed to vicious, or merely fashionable vulgarity. At conclusion of song all clap hands.*

LORD REGGIE (*seated R. of table*).

And now, Miss Katie, won't you dance?

MRS. TAYLORSON.

Why, yes, Katie, you can do that little skirt dance for Lord Reggie.

KATIE.

Why, yes — if you 'll (*to MAMIE*) play. (*Talks to LORD REGGIE.*)

(*MAMIE begins to play opening bars of the Sonata Pathétique.*)

KATIE.

Oh, Mamie, not that one! That's the tune the old cow died of!

MAMIE (*with indignation*).

Did you expect me to play anything different? My style is Classic.

KATIE.

Oh, well, I know that, but try how I will, I can't dance worth a cent to really good music. Please play something vulgar just for this once!

MAMIE (*with a deep sigh*).

Well, I will. (*Plays.*)

KATIE *dances most decorously; while she is dancing enter ST. ORBYN.*)

LASCELLES.

O, le bienvenu! How did you escape so soon? (*Leaning on back of piano.*) Was the widow's ball a bore?

ST. ORBYN (*YOLANDE goes to him*).

I could not love "ma belle cousine" so much loved
I not dulness more! (*Shakes hands with YOLANDE.*)

YOLANDE.

Pshaw! Mama, Lord St. Orbyn always calls me
cousin!

MRS. TAYLORSON.

Why, that's very kind!

KATIE.

Mama, let me present Lord St. Orbyn. (*Mrs.*
TAYLORSON rises.) Lord St. Orbyn, this is my mother,
Mrs. Whitcomb J. Taylorson. (*Crosses and speaks to*
YOLANDE.)

MRS. TAYLORSON.

Happy to meet you, Lord St. Orbyn.

ST. ORBYN (*to MRS. TAYLORSON*).

Delighted to meet the charming mother of the
Muses.

(*YOLANDE sits on the supper table.*)

MRS. TAYLORSON (*very practically*).

Oh, now, Lord St. Orbyn! You know Mamie?
(*LORD ST. ORBYN bows to MAMIE.*) If you would

just put in a word (*confidentially*) for Yolande and Katie at the Grand Opera House, I'd be real grateful to you. You know they're studying their voices here for the stage. Mamie, of course, is at the Conservatoire, studying the piano.

MAMIE.

For the Lamoureux Concerts . . . nothing less!

MRS. TAYLORSON.

Yolande's had elegant offers, but she won't marry. She's an artiste by temperament. Art with her is all in all.

YOLANDE.

(*With her mouth full. Still sitting on table and taking up a dish of pastry.*)

I live for Art. Marriage is like a good pie spoilt in the baking. Everything is admirable except the result! It is very heavy . . . very, very heavy! (*Bursts into laughter and throws plate on the floor.*)

KATIE.

Why, Yolande, how you do act! I sh' think you'd be ashamed!

YOLANDE.

Get along! He's not the only pebble on the beach!

ST. ORBYN (*going over to LASCELLES at piano*).

Just get rid of them for a moment. Send them into the billiard-room. I want a few minutes with you. I must be quiet. (*Crosses up into recess L.*)

LASCELLES.

Here, Reggie, just go into the billiard-room a little while.

[*Exeunt REGGIE, YOLANDE, and KATIE.*]

LASCELLES.

Here, Toto, just go with the other children into the next room.

TOTO (*eating stolidly at head of table*).

Oh no; I'm still too hungry!

LASCELLES.

I thought of that. There is another supper in there. (*Gives his arm to MRS. TAYLORSON.*)

MRS. TAYLORSON.

Why, how lavish!

[*Exeunt MRS. TAYLORSON, TOTO, and MAMIE.*]

LASCELLES.

Yolande is a great dear! Awful straight goer too! Is n't she amusing?

ST. ORBYN.

(Coming down R. with a sigh of relief, and sitting in chair.)

Oh, I dare say, when one is in the right vein.

LASCELLES.

Why, what is the matter?

ST. ORBYN.

It's a wise man that knows his own imbecility!

LASCELLES.

But this is serious. When Yolande begins to bore a man, I know what to expect. You must be contemplating marriage.

ST. ORBYN *(irritably)*.

No doubt. If anything on earth would fairly *kick* one into marriage, it would be Yolande! But, I'm not thinking about her at all.

LASCELLES.

Of course not. *(Gets chair from table and sits.)* Has she blue eyes, this time, or brown? Has she a cruel parent, or a brutal husband? Is she tender, or is she proud?

ST. ORBYN.

This is altogether a new experience! *This* . . . this is the real thing! I have often been taken, often fallen in love, if you like, for all sorts of reasons; but, *this* time I am not conscious of any particular reason one way or the other. It is destiny . . . destiny!

LASCELLES.

If you once begin to talk about destiny, you know . . .

ST. ORBYN.

I am not a romantic boy with a head full of rhymes and a liver full of illusions. . . .

LASCELLES.

I'd rather be ruled by a liver than by love!

ST. ORBYN.

A liver lasts longer! Oh, I know my world—I know women. I know their *faults*. I know their good points too. Women may be whole oceans deeper than we are, but they are also a whole paradise better! She may have got us out of Eden, but as a compensation she makes the earth very pleasant! If I have not married, it is because I did n't believe in women.

LASCELLES.

Why, then!

ST. ORBYN.

Because I have not believed in *myself*!

LASCELLES.

And now?

ST. ORBYN.

Oh, now I begin to understand my own poetry!
That's *something*, you know — hang it! that's a good
deal; indeed, that's half the battle!

LASCELLES.

You have certainly written a lot of poetry about
love.

ST. ORBYN.

Well, it was all imagination. It was not from my
own experience.

LASCELLES.

They say the nightingale sings divinely during his
courtship, but, once mated, he can only croak.

ST. ORBYN.

That may be my case. At any rate, I have at
last met the one woman I can worship . . . do you

hear—*worship?* . . . (*Rises.*) What do you know about worship? . . . Nothing!

LASCELLES.

I am having an object-lesson now. (*Turning chair towards* ST. ORBYN.)

ST. ORBYN.

Guess who it is?

LASCELLES.

I must decline that indiscretion.

ST. ORBYN.

(*Sitting at supper table and moving things about nervously.*)

Think of the ass she is engaged to. Think of the dull, portentous bore with the brain of a . . . a . . . lobster and the heart of a . . . a . . . spring onion! (*Takes a piece of lobster and a spring onion out of the salad bowl.*) Think of *him*.

LASCELLES.

By Jove! you don't mean . . .

ST. ORBYN.

Yes, I do. There is but one.

LASCELLES.

Good Lord! What is going to happen?

ST. ORBYN (*sitting R. of table*).

A row, of course.

LASCELLES.

But seriously . . . you mean Bill Beauvedere?

ST. ORBYN.

Not seriously — *superfluously!* That is all — *superfluously*. He must be removed. He can't be permitted: he is an unnecessary person!

LASCELLES.

That's all very well, but this is going to be awkward.

ST. ORBYN.

By no means. A little friendly jobbery, that's all! I know his mother, I know the girl — such a nice, good, plain girl — he ought to marry. It is just a simple case of a *plus b plus x minus x* — a mere matter of subtraction. These problems are nothing to me.

LASCELLES.

I have every confidence in your skill, but these things work out better on paper than they do in the flesh.

ST. ORBYN.

Bosh! Flesh! Who cares for the flesh? My godmother renounced all that for me at my baptism!

LASCELLES.

Ah! there is where you diplomatists come to grief; you are always backing the devil against the world . . . and the rest of it.

ST. ORBYN.

The devil is a very poor creature. I have no opinion of him . . . I would n't put a shilling on him; a low, tenth-rate, rank outsider! Faust called in all hell in order to ruin one simple girl, and she, by her prayers to Heaven, saved his soul! No, love will get the better of the devil every time; love is the supreme power; love, my dear fellow, is . . . simply tremendous; love is the one thing that always wins, and must win; love has wings, do you hear? . . . wings!

LASCELLES.

Yes . . . to fly away!

ST. ORBYN.

No, no. That's so vulgar; everybody says that who has backed a wrong 'un! No, love has wings to lift one out of every trouble, every disaster; love . . .

LASCELLES.

If this fancy comes to a crisis, I suppose you know what will happen ?

ST. ORBYN.

No.

LASCELLES.

Miss Gainsborough is a charming girl, and beautiful — but she's no match! She is all that a woman should be — high-minded, virtuous, exquisite, but — she's no match!

ST. ORBYN (*rising*).

No match!

LASCELLES.

She has, perhaps, five thousand pound, all told. The Duke of Drumdrosset, her grandfather, is a recluse; few people have even heard of him — at any rate he's not a bit of good! It would be a foolish marriage. It would, indeed. No candid friend of yours could say otherwise.

ST. ORBYN (*satirically, moving towards fireplace*).

And yet — she is all that a woman should be, charming, beautiful, high-minded, virtuous, exquisite!

LASCELLES.

Well, are n't there other women equally delightful, but who have money into the bargain, and who have

influence in the right quarters? What I ask is this — does your private fortune, quite apart from your salary, allow you to play Prince Charming to Cinderella?

ST. ORBYN (*to himself*).

No match! Good Lord! No match! (*Laughs.*)

LASCELLES.

I know the Foreign Office. They will take you away from Rome. You will never get Paris or Petersburg — never! But they will give you something dingy and feverish, God knows where!

ST. ORBYN (*seating himself*).

Let 'em! Fine appointments are rare, but a good wife is rarer. The Foreign Office, my dear fellow, is not, and never has been the master of my fate. I do my work honestly, and if they can find a better fellow for *their* business, let 'em send for him by all means. But my marriage is *my* business. Miss Gainsborough is a lady who, if she consents to join her life with mine, will do me the greatest honour that existence can give. Do you understand me now?

LASCELLES.

I do! (*Rises; gets cigarette-box from table.*)

ST. ORBYN.

Moreover, say that my private means *are* small, well, when I retire, I can live in what people call a small way. I can do admirably on £2,000 a year—and bills!

LASCELLES.

Bills! That is what I am thinking of. With your tastes, your habits (*handing him cigarette from box on table*), your friends! This is all very well and pretty, but at your age and with your experience. . . .

ST. ORBYN.

I don't care. It is just because I *am* at my age and have *had* my experience that I am determined to have my own way. With £2,000 a year one can take a little place in the country, and what with one's books and one's garden . . . and a friend or two to stay with one now and again . . .

LASCELLES.

Oh, charming—for a short time! But it is very difficult to live on £2,000 a year all the year round! And then your ambition?

ST. ORBYN.

What of that? In the age of chivalry one's devotion to a sweetheart was as necessary as one's glory

in the fight. A man was no man unless he could be determined in love. Well, it's the same to-day. A man is still a man. And when you see a fellow really making his mark, really feared by his enemies and liked by his friends, you will find . . .

LASCELLES.

What?

ST. ORBYN.

You will find that he has had, among other things, the sense to marry for love.

LASCELLES.

But love-matches don't always make for happiness!

ST. ORBYN.

Never mind that. The great thing is to love—not to be happy. Love is for both worlds. Perfect happiness is for the other only.

LASCELLES.

Well, say you are very fond of Miss Gainsborough. . . .

ST. ORBYN.

I'm *not* "very fond" of her . . . I *love her!* My part is sure at any rate. The rest is for Providence or Fate.

LASCELLES.

My goodness!

ST. ORBYN.

I take her for better for worse, for richer for poorer. (*Naïvely.*) There is nothing about happiness or the Foreign Office in the marriage vows! And, moreover . . . (*perceiving DUVAL enter R., changes whole tone*) . . . Yes, as you were saying, it is clear as daylight that the Government desires to see the whole question settled. (*Crosses the room.*)

(DUVAL hands LASCELLES a card.)

LASCELLES.

(*Without reading the card; grinning.*)

Oh, this is Tina — dear little Tina! She's killing! But fancy the puss sending up a card. (*To DUVAL.*) Show her up. (*Exit DUVAL. LASCELLES takes card to lamp, reading it to himself.*) Good Lord! . . .

ST. ORBYN.

What is the matter?

LASCELLES.

It is n't Tina, after all! It's some one . . . some one . . . else.

ST. ORBYN (*languidly*).

Can't you pack her into the billiard-room with the others?

LASCELLES.

Well, I need n't see her here. I'll tell you what I'll do — I'll . . . (*walks to door R.*).

(*Just as he is going to the door, DUVAL ushers in JULIET, who has a lace scarf over her head. As she enters, she throws back the scarf. ST. ORBYN springs to his feet on recognising her. Both bow low — then ST. ORBYN goes in the billiard-room, leaving LASCELLES and JULIET together.*)

JULIET.

Major Lascelles, you will be greatly surprised . . .

LASCELLES.

No, no. Pray sit down. I am only sorry that . . .

(*Loud peals of laughter from the billiard-room.*)

JULIET (*starting and speaking eagerly*).

I came to ask a favour. . . . It is something I cannot write, because there is not a moment to be lost — not an instant.

LASCELLES.

You have only to ask it.

JULIET.

It is about Vivian. He was here this afternoon, *was n't he?* And you very kindly allowed him to join . . . to join one of your amusing games, *did n't* you? And in the excitement . . . he . . . *inadvertently* gave you something by mistake . . . *did n't* he?

LASCELLES (*very quietly*).

I knew . . . at the time, that it was, as you say, a mistake . . . there is no occasion for anxiety. (*Goes to escritoire up L., and unlocks it, and takes out envelope.*) The error . . . is in that.

JULIET.

But the debt?

LASCELLES.

The debt? That's Vivian's lesson. You know there's a time to be young, there's a time to be foolish.

JULIET.

Oh, how can I thank you! I was so anxious, because his mother does not understand . . . games and things, as *you* do.

LASCELLES.

She shall never know.

JULIET.

It was a mistake, after all, any one might make, *was n't it?*

LASCELLES.

Oh, yes, quite a common occurrence. Never gave it a second thought!

JULIET.

How good you are! And . . . now, I have to ask something else. (*With great difficulty.*) Don't explain my reason for coming here to Lord St. Orbyn.

LASCELLES (*taking her hand*).

Is that your wish, because . . . he might think . . .

JULIET.

It *is* my wish. Don't explain on *any* account.

LASCELLES.

I promise you.

JULIET.

Thank you. (*Shakes hands with him. Laughter heard from the billiard-room.*) May I go now? (*Moves to door below sofa. LADY BEAUVEDERE knocks a door.*)

LASCELLES.

Who is that ?

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*entering and coming down R. C.*).

May I come in ?

JULIET (*with a cry of terror*).

Ah! . . . Lady Beauvedere !

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*advancing*).

Major Lascelles, I must apologise for this intrusion. It is made, as you may believe, against my will ; but I thought Juliet ought not to be here alone. . . . (*She pauses.*)

LASCELLES.

I hope you don't think . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*haughtily*).

If you ask me what I *think*, I can only say that I know *nothing*, that I understand nothing, and, on the other hand, that I can conceive of nothing that would explain this.

JULIET.

(*To LASCELLES, seeing him about to speak.*)

Please . . . please ! Let me see Lady Beauvedere alone for a few minutes.

LASCELLES.

But Lady Beauvedere may not be aware that your father is one of my oldest friends.

(Billiard-room door bursts open and YOLANDE runs in, sees visitors.)

YOLANDE.

Great Cæsar!

(Bangs door and goes out, giggling loudly.)

LADY BEAUVEDERE *(controlling her indignation)*.

No doubt Miss Gainsborough finds a party of *old* friends more amusing than one among new acquaintances!

JULIET *(to LASCELLES)*.

Please leave us.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I am unable to remain here, Major Lascelles. I have stolen away, as it is, from my own house, my own guests, in order to save this reckless girl from the worst consequences of this conduct. I blame you more *(to LASCELLES)*, but I blame her sufficiently.

(Singing from billiard-room; LASCELLES goes to door to quiet them, and remains at back of stage, by the writing table.)

JULIET (*to LADY BEAUVEDERE*).

(*This scene to be taken at a quick pace. The words must come, as it were, like hailstones.*)

Wait, wait! I know I must seem foolish, and . . . everything else. I know that, and I can never explain, never. But, you need not be so sorrowful because I am no longer engaged to Bill.

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*astounded*).

No longer engaged to Bill! Has he broken off the engagement?

JULIET (*smiling sadly*).

No, I wrote to him before he came from Berlin. Five days ago. The letter missed him, unfortunately, but he has got the letter this evening. I know that he has it, for I gave it to him myself.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

But what did he say? My poor boy, how did he bear it?

JULIET (*firmly*).

Nothing that he could *say* would alter me, and I am sure he will bear it in the way you would most desire!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

But — why did you do this . . . why ?

JULIET (*with spirit*).

Because I saw that you were miserable : because I knew . . . suddenly . . . that I did not love him well enough : because I felt, all at once, that we could never, *never* make each other happy — that it was most unfair to him, to you, to all of us, from beginning to end : that is the reason why !

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Had you seen any one else ?

JULIET.

No, I had not seen any one else *then*, except my sister.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

My poor child ! (*After a struggle with herself*.) Still this is madness. What will people think ? Will they believe that you broke it off ? Such good prospects ! It is but fair to give you warning. You are young and romantic. You have no mother to advise you. (*Firmly*.) It is but fair to give you warning.

JULIET.

Oh, I know that Sir William is rich. I know that he could give me everything that *money* can buy! But *I* am thinking of the things that money *cannot* buy!—my ideals—my dreams!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Ideals!—dreams! Good heavens! (*In a tone of self-mockery.*)

JULIET.

Yes—the ideals that men and women have died for, for which they have been burnt—tortured—martyred. Are they nothing in the world? Shall I give up these treasures?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Oh, when one is young, one is full of these enthusiasms.

JULIET.

Have you none yourself? Don't you ever feel there is something lacking in these big parties? Do you never get tired of these smart friends?—friends who would tear your soul to ribbons if it would make a lunch more lively! Do you always like these brutal jokes—this hateful scramble to go one better and be, at any cost, amused? It's horrid, it is contemptible!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

My dear child, do you find *me* contemptible ?

JULIET.

No ; unhappy !

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*laughing uneasily*).

Me, unhappy ! What a notion !

JULIET.

You are, you must be. (*Touching her arm.*) You are too good, too gentle, to be contented with such a stifling life. You must long for the free, fresh air, to watch the sky, to hear a little of the music of the woods and fields. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Woods and fields. . . . (*Stares blankly into space.*)

JULIET.

Don't you want one human heart at least on which you can always depend ?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I have my boy. I ask for no more. I have Vivian. He is my best.

JULIET (*sorrowfully*).

Oh, yes, I know how dearly you love him.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Dearly is not the word. It is idolatry. Sometimes I fear it is wrong. But he is mine, and when all the worldly maxims are said, when all is done, the love between mother and child is real; children do not care whether one is looking one's best or one's worst; whether one is young, old, pretty, or plain. Vivian is all I have — all!

JULIET.

I know . . . I know. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*with feeling*).

And all I *want*.

JULIET (*a little surprised*).

Yes. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*looking at her*).

Oh, Juliet, what an enigma! what a contradiction!
(*Takes her hand in hers.*) I was beginning to care for you, I was beginning to understand you. I had no daughter of my own. Oh, Juliet, what an enigma!

JULIET (*standing*).

Oh, no, it is all simple enough, *if* it could be all told. But it *cannot* be told. One may stop wondering about it, and, if possible, forget it. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*standing*).

Juliet, I won't wonder about you. I won't ask you any questions. (*Holds out both her hands.*) But, will you come back with me?

JULIET.

Oh, why are people always kind to each other — too late?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Don't say that, dear Juliet. No one, not even Bill, shall ever hear of this . . . escapade: but, come back again with me. To-morrow we can part, perhaps not to meet again, but let us part friends. Will you come? (*Moves a little towards her.*)

JULIET (*looking at her*).

You are very good.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Don't hesitate, my dear child, come. (*Goes up to her and takes her hand.*) I feel, I *know* . . . something

tells me that . . . (*kisses her*) . . . that perhaps we shall never really like each other: we are so different. But I trust you, I *do* trust you. I don't know why, but I do. (*Puts her arm round her.*)

JULIET (*after a moment's pause*).

Yes, I will come . . . till to-morrow.

(*They go out in silence, each wondering at the other, without heeding LASCELLES.*)

LASCELLES (*looking after them*).

I shall never, no, *never* understand good women. I suppose they will go back to the ball, and smile at each other like angels of light till—they part for ever by the first possible train on the morrow.

(*He goes up to door L., opens it, and calls ST. ORBYN, who enters rather grave, but otherwise inscrutable; says nothing, but picks up newspaper and sits down to it.*)

LASCELLES.

Here is a fine scandal, and the worst of it is—I hope you won't mind—but Miss Gainsborough has made me promise not to give you the smallest explanation of her visit here.

ST. ORBYN (*springing to his feet, radiant*).

Ah, I knew it! Dear, innocent little creature. I knew it, I knew it all along!

LASCELLES (*astonished*).

Knew what?

ST. ORBYN.

My dear fellow, if she had *not* been innocent, she would have insisted on nothing *but* explanations for the rest of your life and mine! . . . Good-night! (*Advances to door.*)

LASCELLES.

What! Are you going?

ST. ORBYN.

Going! I should think so. I am going after her. (*Goes to door, but comes back again.*) Are the lights still burning over the way?

LASCELLES (*going to window and opening it*).

Yes. The ball is in full swing. Can't you hear "The Jewel of Asia"?

ST. ORBYN.

Thank Heaven! (*Goes out and comes back.*) Lascelles!

LASCELLES.

What?

ST. ORBYN.

Is n't she a dream? (*Disappears.*)

LASCELLES.

What is happening to the world! One would think you were a boy out of school!

ST. ORBYN (*coming back*).

I will tell you all about it to-morrow. (*Going.*)

LASCELLES.

You will be late if you don't hurry.

ST. ORBYN (*opening door*).

Not I! (*Starts back.*) Good Heavens! No wonder I could not cross the threshold. (*Stoops and picks up something.*)

LASCELLES.

What is the matter?

ST. ORBYN.

A rosette from her shoe! The darling rosette from her precious shoe! (*Kisses it, then to LASCELLES.*) You dull, moping dog, jealous. . . .

(*Loud laughter from billiard-room, and all the guests rush in, followed by MRS. TAYLORSON.*)

YOLANDE.

Your Excellency must not leave us!

ST. ORBYN.

(Thrusting hand with rosette into breast, and bowing low.)

I go, dear lady, because I dare not stay.

YOLANDE.

But the fun . . . the fun is *just* beginning!

ST. ORBYN.

Dear lady, no doubt! But I seek the nightingale,
and not the lark! *(Kisses his hand and goes out, leaving
the guests dancing.)*

END OF THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT

SCENE: *The garden outside drawing-room at LADY BEAUVEDERE'S. It is planted in the Italian style with parterres, gravel walks, statuary, and a few acacia-trees. The dawn is just appearing in the sky, and a few stars are still to be seen. Lights are within the house, and the garden is moderately illuminated. The hour is 4 a.m. As the curtain rises VIVIAN is watching at the garden gate in great anxiety. He looks at his watch.*

VIVIAN.

Will she never come? What has happened? How late it is! She will be missed to a dead certainty. . . . She will be missed.

(At this moment GWENDOLENE and SIR WILLIAM appear on the wide step with balcony rail which leads from the conservatory into the garden. VIVIAN retires into the house unobserved.)

GWENDOLENE.

How sweet it is out here!

SIR WILLIAM.

Yes, and I hope not damp.

GWENDOLENE.

I hope, as you say, not damp.

SIR WILLIAM.

Gwen, why do you no longer wear the brooch I gave you?

GWENDOLENE (*banging her head*).

I thought I needed . . . no further reminder of our . . . of our friendship.

SIR WILLIAM.

Don't say that! We must always be friends, Gwen.

GWENDOLENE.

In time we may be, but, just now . . . it is too hard.

SIR WILLIAM.

You are awfully fond of me, are n't you, Gwen?

GWENDOLENE.

Is this right, Bill — is this kind?

SIR WILLIAM.

Would I ask it if I entertained the smallest doubt as to its propriety?

GWENDOLENE.

I . . . I suppose not.

(SIR WILLIAM *leads GWENDOLENE to seat and then stands by her.*)

SIR WILLIAM.

Gwen, Juliet has given me back my freedom. I have been free without knowing it for very nearly five days. I could not in the circumstances ask her to reconsider the matter. She never loved me . . . at least as you do !

GWENDOLENE.

Oh, Bill !

SIR WILLIAM (*seating himself by her*).

Gwen, perhaps in two . . . or three . . . possibly *four* years' time we may marry, you and I, and gather a circle of the very nicest people round us, and exercise the best influence upon Society.

GWENDOLENE.

What happiness, dearest Bill !

SIR WILLIAM.

It ought to be . . . I think it will be.

GWENDOLENE.

And shall we go to Italy for our honeymoon ?

SIR WILLIAM.

Most probably. One soon gets tired of a place that is *merely* climate ! One wants something to look at . . . to keep one interested, and all that . . . (*Feeling the arm of the seat.*) Is the dew falling ? (*Rises.*)

GWENDOLENE (*rises*).

Won't you kiss me, Bill ?

SIR WILLIAM (*approaching her*).

I thought I did. (*Kisses her cheek and walks up c., leaving her.*)

GWENDOLENE (*after a pause*).

Yes, it does seem rather chilly. Shall we go in ?

SIR WILLIAM.

You know we are such friends, dear Gwen, that you would not expect *raptures*, would you ?

GWENDOLENE.

No . . . no . . . not exactly raptures !

SIR WILLIAM.

It is much more sensible, really, not to want you to catch cold.

GWENDOLENE.

(Walks up to him and looks into his face.)

It must have been on such a night as this when Romeo climbed the wall of Juliet's garden. Oh, Bill, you do like me a little, don't you? People seem to think we are such icebergs!

SIR WILLIAM.

That's because people are fools. *(With sudden and genuine feeling, embracing her.)* I am simply awfully fond of you. *(Kisses her.)* There, will that satisfy you?

GWENDOLENE.

Oh, quite!

SIR WILLIAM.

Shall we go in?
(They go in. VIVIAN comes out again from the shadow.)

VIVIAN.

Will she never come? I hope there has been no mistake. Lascelles has just opened his window. . . .

I believe he is there. What on earth has happened?
. . . (*Rattle of key heard in the door.*) At last! (*He rushes forward as door is opened and LADY BEAUVEDERE enters followed by JULIET. VIVIAN falls back in astonishment. To LADY BEAUVEDERE.*) You!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(*Smiling with a strong effort.*)

Did I startle you, darling? Juliet and I have just been out for a little air. It seems so very close this evening. Surely we have not been long?

VIVIAN (*stammering*).

I . . . I . . . don't know . . . I should say . . . no. Why?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(*Handing him her scarf.*)

Put my scarf over there. I don't need it. (*He takes scarf and places it on seat L. While he crosses the stage LADY BEAUVEDERE addresses JULIET.*) For your own sake, say nothing. I will not betray you. You may trust me. I have given you my word.
(*JULIET merely inclines her head. Enter SIR CHARLES DE LORME from house.*)

SIR CHARLES.

Ah, Lady Beauvedere, I have been seeking you. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

How wrong of me! I stole out into the garden.
These April nights are so delicious!

SIR CHARLES.

Alas! I have not got an April chest! I cannot
take these enjoyments. But, they are forming a co-
tillon: I believe they wait for us.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Then let us go at once.

(They go into house.)

VIVIAN.

*(Comes up to JULIET when his mother has gone. JULIET
is standing motionless, looking on the ground.)*

Is it all right?

JULIET.

(R. C. Sitting down; mechanically.)

Yes . . . all right. . . . He gave it me.

VIVIAN.

What, the cheque? *(JULIET merely bows her head.)*
Thank God! Oh, Juliet, I have been mad. I

have been half dead with anxiety. Why *were* you so long?

JULIET.

Yes . . . it must have seemed . . . a long while.

VIVIAN.

Was he disagreeable?

JULIET.

Oh no. . . . He was very kind.

VIVIAN.

How did you meet my mother? What an escape!

JULIET.

I did n't escape.

VIVIAN.

What do you mean?

JULIET.

I did n't escape, Vivian. She must have seen me go, or, some one told her. She followed me.

VIVIAN.

Where?

JULIET.

Into the house. . . . Into the very room.

VIVIAN (*horrified*).

Into the very room. . . . Then . . . she knows . . .

JULIET.

She knows nothing.

VIVIAN.

But what excuse did you make ?

JULIET.

None.

VIVIAN.

That must have been devilish awkward !

JULIET.

Yes, it was . . . awkward.

VIVIAN.

What does she think ?

JULIET (*in tears*).

Don't ask me. I have done all that was possible for both of you. Be satisfied.

VIVIAN.

Mama is not easily satisfied. She would think, you know, all sorts of things.

JULIET.

Oh, leave me . . . leave me alone. I cannot tell you any more. I have tried to love an enemy . . . now let me pay the price, without a regret, do you understand, without a single regret. I want to feel that I should do it all again, willingly, and that is n't easy. Don't ask me any more.

(*Enter LORD LAVENSTHORPE, a pale, insipid young man with a silly smile.*)

LORD LAVENSTHORPE.

Really, Miss Gainsborough, I have been looking for you everywhere. You promised to go in to supper with me. Have you forgotten?

JULIET (*rising*).

Oh no. I was just hoping you had forgotten (*perceiving her mistake*) . . . I mean . . .

LAVENSTHORPE.

Yes, what *did* you mean?

JULIET.

Oh, I was afraid that you would get so hungry — that's all. (*She goes out on LAVENSTHORPE'S arm.*)

VIVIAN (*clenching his hands*).

Oh, I can't have this. It's too cowardly. I would sooner make a clean breast of the whole thing — I can't have a girl suffer all this just because I have been such a fool. (*Garden door opens.*) Who is that? (*He retires L.*)

(*Enter ST. ORBYN, with a quick step, humming a lively air.*)

ST. ORBYN.

Hullo! Is that Vivian?

VIVIAN (*coming forward*).

Yes, I . . . I . . . Oh, Lord St. Orbyn, I am so beastly miserable.

ST. ORBYN.

Why? What is the matter? Come to the light. (*Studies his face.*) This won't do. Are you in love? Are you jealous? or, what is a far more serious thing, is *she* jealous?

VIVIAN.

Oh, it's nothing pleasant like that! I have got Juliet into an awful scrape.

ST. ORBYN.

Juliet! How can this be?

VIVIAN

She is the most splendid brick of a girl I have ever heard of.

ST. ORBYN.

What has she done ?

VIVIAN.

She went to Lascelles to get me out of a . . . devil of a hole. And Mama followed her there, and Juliet never explained !

ST. ORBYN.

Yes, yes, but you can explain ! What is it ? Make haste ! Don't try to talk well — just splutter it out anyhow ! When a man has facts he need n't be clever.

VIVIAN.

Mama, you know, hates Lascelles, and I have been playing cards with him . . . and . . .

ST. ORBYN (*smoothly*).

At first you won, and then you lost, and then you could not pay your losses with perfect convenience at that particular moment ! That's simple enough. (*He puts his hat on a chair.*) And then ?

VIVIAN.

I got over-excited.

ST. ORBYN.

Most natural thing in the world!

VIVIAN (*eagerly*).

Yes, you know how it is. I had always heard what a frightful disgrace it was not to pay debts of honour, and so . . .

ST. ORBYN.

You adopted certain measures . . .

VIVIAN.

Yes . . . but . . .

ST. ORBYN (*kindly*).

Somehow you feel that you can never again be so happy as you were before.

VIVIAN (*half in tears*).

It was all that rotten cheque.

ST. ORBYN.

Cheque belonging to the family, I suppose?

VIVIAN.

Ye . . . s . . . by way of being a family cheque.

ST. ORBYN.

And you put . . . a sort of family name on the back?

VIVIAN.

Yes, but I knew it was not the sort of thing that fellows do . . . as a rule.

ST. ORBYN.

Not as a rule! But it is done. It may be rather distinguished and out of the way. One should n't do it again. But, what is the rest?

VIVIAN.

Juliet got it for me . . . the cheque, I mean. Lascelles gave it to her. Awfully decent of Lascelles.

ST. ORBYN.

Where is it now?

VIVIAN.

Here is the beastly thing.

ST. ORBYN.

Give it to me. (VIVIAN *does so*. ST. ORBYN *looks at it, tears off the endorsed half, and burns it with a match, sitting on seat*.) Well, go on. What else happened?

VIVIAN.

Well, of course when Mama came bouncing in Juliet could not explain *why* she was at Lascelles', because she would n't give me away! And so . . . and so, poor Juliet is quite misunderstood. Mama is such a stickler for etiquette and chaperons, and all that rot!

ST. ORBYN.

What do you propose to do?

VIVIAN.

Oh, I must see Mama and put it all square. I can't have a girl suffer on my account. That's playing very low down.

ST. ORBYN (*rising and moving towards VIVIAN*).

My boy, leave all this to me. Say nothing, and I promise you that no harm will come to any one. Let me see your mother, and I will make the thing look as well . . . as such a thing can look!

VIVIAN.

Oh, you are good.

ST. ORBYN.

One word. Remember the words of the poet:
"Oh, Nemesis, let me never crave anything so wildly

that I would desire to seize it from its legitimate possessor." Recollect this always, and then you will find existence most enjoyable. Whenever we meet, let us remind each other of this. Go back to your dancing . . . and don't be wretched any more. Everybody always forgets . . . everything. I usually do myself. In fact, it is one of my rules. The only one I ever keep. Go back to your dancing. (*Crosses garden.*)

VIVIAN.

I say, you are, you know, the most awfully understanding person I've ever met!

ST. ORBYN.

That will do . . . that's all right.

VIVIAN.

I know what you think of me, you know.

ST. ORBYN.

I never think about anybody. I merely look at 'em and make up my mind.

VIVIAN.

Well, don't make up your mind about me just yet.

ST. ORBYN.

Well, we'll put it this way — I have n't *changed* my mind about you.

VIVIAN.

Thanks! (*Seizes his band.*) I shall find Juliet, and tell her you know everything — that you are simply the most splendid friend. . . . (*Goes out with a smothered sob, blowing his nose violently.*)

ST. ORBYN (*taking the rosette from his pocket and kissing it*).

A *plus b plus x minus x*. What is to be done — what is to be done with that odious *minus x*?

(LADY BEAUVEDERE *appears on the steps and moving L., calls.*)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Is Juliet there? Is Bill there?

ST. ORBYN.

Ah, my dear Geraldine, do come out. This is enchanting. Byron was quite wrong when he said that the early dawn did not suit women. I have never seen you looking better.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I am not well. (*She comes down the steps.*) I am dreadfully tired.

ST. ORBYN.

Come, put this round you (*takes up scarf VIVIAN left on seat*), and sit down here with me. (*She sits down.*) But, before we begin to talk nicely, and before I forget it, do you see this? (*Holds up half of the cheque.*)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Good gracious! (*Taking cheque.*) Where did you find that?

ST. ORBYN.

In the oddest way. You remember the day I wrote, against my judgment, at your desk?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Perfectly!

ST. ORBYN.

Well, among other strange possibilities, that *may* have been caught up among my papers! At any rate, there it is, and I have not the smallest doubt that I have destroyed the other half!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

How amusing! I did miss it, as a matter of fact, and I was a little anxious. . . . Such an awkward thing to speak about!

ST. ORBYN.

And now, what a charming ball this has been!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I am glad you think so.

ST. ORBYN.

I have never enjoyed myself so much before. But, wait, I know there was something else. (*Walks to R. of seat.*) I have a little message for you from Vivian.

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*frightened*).

Vivian! What can it be?

ST. ORBYN.

My dear Geraldine, a trifle to us, but to these children a great affair.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Oh, Bertie, he does not want to *marry* anybody, does he?

ST. ORBYN.

Gently, gently. You are still a girl in your emotions. You are always in a nervous flutter about some one marrying or not marrying.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

But so many trying things have happened this evening, I am quite unstrung.

ST. ORBYN.

Well, listen to me and I may account for some of these mysteries. It seems there has been a little misunderstanding between Vivian and Lascelles. You know the sort of heady, absurd . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Yes, yes. Dear Vivian is so impulsive.

ST. ORBYN.

Precisely. He is too impulsive. Without going into the merits of the case . . . (*watching her closely*) . . . it might have led, managed, to a duel!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Oh, heavens!

ST. ORBYN.

The matter came to Miss Gainsborough's ears. Her first thought was, naturally, for you: she offered to intercede, to make peace.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Noble-hearted girl!

ST. ORBYN.

She went to Lascelles. She pleaded her cause, effected a reconciliation, was about to return with her good news to Vivian, when . . . perhaps you know the rest. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Oh, how wrong I have been, how unjust! (*Rises.*) But I trusted her, I told her so, I did, really. And she did it all to save me! Oh, Bertie, where is she? Let me thank her on my knees. (*Looking vaguely round.*)

ST. ORBYN.

Yes; she is worth it.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

And now, just as I was beginning to appreciate her, and understand her, and love her: it is all too late . . . too late. What a world it is! I am *so* vexed, so *dreadfully* vexed.

ST. ORBYN.

Vexed? Why?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

She has broken off her engagement with Bill.

ST. ORBYN.

(*Controlling his astonishment, rises, walks L. a little, then speaks.*)

But, you know, I rather expected that!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

She wrote to him, it seems, the very day we were all saying horrid things about her. (*Rises and crosses to him.*) Dear Bertie, you are so clever. Let us do our utmost to bring these two together again.

ST. ORBYN.

Bring them together again!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Yes, it may be a mere lover's tiff. Make peace between them. You manage these things so wonderfully.

ST. ORBYN.

Geraldine, I will be frank with you. I cannot dissemble, as you know.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I do indeed. I always feel I can read you like a book!

ST. ORBYN (*a little sorry for her*).

Y . . . e . . . s . . . of course! But, to be honest, I would do anything to further your happiness, yet, in this instance, I must think of my own.

(LADY BEAUVEDERE *reseats herself*.)

ST. ORBYN.

The fact is, there is an obstacle, — an unsurmountable obstacle.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

What is that, pray?

ST. ORBYN.

There's another man. (*Sits by her side*.)

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(*As though a sudden suspicion had struck her*.)

Oh, surely not.

ST. ORBYN.

There is. I can deal with any other fellow, but this particular one is the plague of my life. The trouble he has given me from time to time is past belief. (*Sits on her R.*) Yet I have a sort of liking for him too! I feel bound to say he would make Juliet the best of husbands!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(Still struggling with suspicion.)

Who is the person? I don't know him.

ST. ORBYN.

Yes, you do, Geraldine. I may know him better, perhaps, but you know him well enough.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

You say he is in love with Juliet?

ST. ORBYN.

He is crazy about her, absolutely crazy. And the man who thinks of a wife, you know, is a very strict observer.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

You cannot mean . . . *(The birds begin to twitter.)*

ST. ORBYN.

Yes, I do, Geraldine. *(Rises.)* I don't sleep, I don't eat, I can't think, my ears ring, my heart dances. I was never so ill, so ridiculous, or so utterly happy in all my life! When I met her . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Do you mean Juliet?

ST. ORBYN.

Yes, when I first met her here, ten days ago, I was just verging on that mood when life seems to have shown one all its prizes—and none of them appear worth while. Do you know that state of mind?

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*sighing*).

Oh yes.

ST. ORBYN.

Love is the only thing, Geraldine! When I say love, I don't mean all this nonsense about sighing and dying, wild kisses, sobs and throbs! I mean affection, devotion, a deep, unwavering trust, I mean . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*rising and crossing to him*).

You mean in fact what every bachelor means when he grows weary of flirtation, and wants to marry some pretty young woman who knows nothing about him. Men, I believe, to be truly happy must have, at least, one simple heart, which they can always impose upon. This process they call trust and sympathy! Sir, you are all born impostors!

ST. ORBYN.

It is because you have these views of us that I have never had the smallest wish to deceive you!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

To think that you love Juliet! . . . Oh, how do these things happen?

ST. ORBYN.

Well, say it's a fine day in spring. You suggest a walk. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Alone?

ST. ORBYN.

Of course not. . . . Say she's pretty — say that you find yourself wishing that she would look you straight in the eyes again. . . .

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*in a low voice*).

Say she does. . . .

ST. ORBYN.

Then you find yourself wishing she had n't?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

But why?

ST. ORBYN.

Because it's dangerous.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I don't understand.

ST. ORBYN.

I can't explain.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Was that how you came to love Juliet?

ST. ORBYN.

No . . . that's how I came to love so many others
in the past.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Then where is the point?

ST. ORBYN.

The point is—now that I have met Juliet—it
shall never happen again . . . in the future.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Hear the birds. . . How happy they must be!
Winged creatures—nearer the sky than we are!
(*Sighs.*)

ST. ORBYN.

Are n't *you* happy, Geraldine?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Not especially!

ST. ORBYN.

Yet, you are young, accomplished, beautiful.

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Bah! I'd rather look old and ugly to some purpose than be as I am — in vain!

ST. ORBYN.

In vain!

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*passionately*).

Yes! In vain! Beauty in some cases is a humiliation — nothing more.

ST. ORBYN.

This from a woman with the world at her feet!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

I prefer a friend for my heart. (*Gives him her hand.*)

ST. ORBYN.

But you have got friends. *I* am one of 'em!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

You! What is it to you whether I'm lovely or hideous?

ST. ORBYN.

Nothing! I think only of your soul!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(Releasing his hand and looking indignant.)

There! I knew it. *(Changes her tone to laughter.)*
How droll!

ST. ORBYN.

Sometimes I believe you wish you had n't got a soul!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Oh, I like my soul well enough, but—it never seems to belong to me—to be *me* . . . myself. Now my face *is me*. . . do you understand?

(PRINCESS VENDRAMINI appears on step above them.)

VENDRAMINI.

Goodbye, dear Lady Beauvedere. I must be going.

LADY BEAUVEDERE *(dazed)*.

What! so early?

VENDRAMINI.

It is four o'clock now, and in a few hours' time I leave Paris for Constantinople. *(To ST. ORBYN.)*
Shall we say, Au revoir?

ST. ORBYN *(kissing her hand)*.

Oh, Princess, we always meet too late, and part too soon.

VENDRAMINI.

(In a low voice inaudible to LADY BEAUVEDERE.)

Oh, Albert, to think you have preferred that little girl to me . . . to me! We two together could have ruled the destinies of Europe!

ST. ORBYN *(kissing her hand again)*.

Only we did n't want to rule 'em, did we? Europe is becoming such a bore!

(PRINCESS VENDRAMINI crosses to LADY BEAUVEDERE.)

JULIET's laughter is heard within. She appears with LAVENSTHORPE. They stand to admire the sunrise. Other couples also come out, and scatter behind the various bushes.)

JULIET *(to LAVENSTHORPE)*.

Is n't it pretty where the light strikes the trees? There is just one star left; do you see?

LAVENSTHORPE.

No.

JULIET.

Then come this way. *(She comes down and crosses stage with LAVENSTHORPE.)*

(ST. ORBYN watches her as if fascinated, and is about to follow.)

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*calling*).

Bertie!

ST. ORBYN.

Did you call?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

Will you take Rosamund to her carriage?

(ST. ORBYN *conceals his chagrin, offers his arm to the PRINCESS, and they go out. LADY BEAUVEDERE watches them till they are out of sight, then she sits down and rests her face on her hand, seeming lost in thought.*)

JULIET.

Leave me here with Lady Beauvedere. I am afraid she is very tired.

(LAVENSTHORPE *bows and leaves her.*)

JULIET (*coming down timidly*).

Are you tired? (*Kneels at her feet.*)

LADY BEAUVEDERE (*rousing herself*).

Is that you, Juliet? I can't say much. . . . Lord St. Orbyn has told me everything about Vivian . . . and . . . you behaved very nobly. I want you to . . . forgive me. (*Bites her lip.*)

JULIET.

Oh, please, never think of that again!

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

(Takes her hands, looks into her face.)

You lucky girl!

JULIET *(astonished)*.

Why?

LADY BEAUVEDERE.

But—he is very fickle. I must say that—very fickle.

JULIET *(innocently)*.

Do you mean Bill?

*(ST. ORBYN enters.)*LADY BEAUVEDERE *(perceiving him)*.

Bertie *(crosses to him)*, I was just warning her that a man we all know is fickle, and she asks—Do I mean Bill? *(She joins their hands.)* Will you tell her who I mean? *(She laughs and goes up steps into house. When she is out of their observation, her face alters. She is in misery.)*

(ST. ORBYN and JULIET stand hand in hand, awkwardly looking at each other. Sun grows brighter as dialogue proceeds, the birds sing softly.)

JULIET (*after a pause*).

But . . . ought n't one to be dancing?

ST. ORBYN.

Not yet . . . Oh, Juliet.

JULIET.

Yes.

ST. ORBYN.

I want to tell you how much — but if I could say how much it would be little — I love you!

JULIET.

Why?

ST. ORBYN.

Because you are pretty . . . and yet that's not the reason.

JULIET.

What, then?

ST. ORBYN.

Because you are honest . . . that's not the reason either.

JULIET.

Well, guess again!

ST. ORBYN.

Because . . . Oh, Juliet, it is because you make me forget the reasons why!

JULIET.

Then remember the reasons why not. I am poor . . .

ST. ORBYN.

So are the angels.

JULIET.

And then . . .

ST. ORBYN.

Well, dearest ?

JULIET.

. . . You make me forget the reasons why not !

ST. ORBYN.

Juliet ! (*He moves to embrace her.*)

(*At this moment music is heard within : last valse beginning. Couples emerge from behind every bush, and out of every corner.*)

ST. ORBYN.

Are n't we alone ? (*Looking round.*)JULIET (*nervously*).

Ought n't one to be dancing ?

END OF THE PLAY

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